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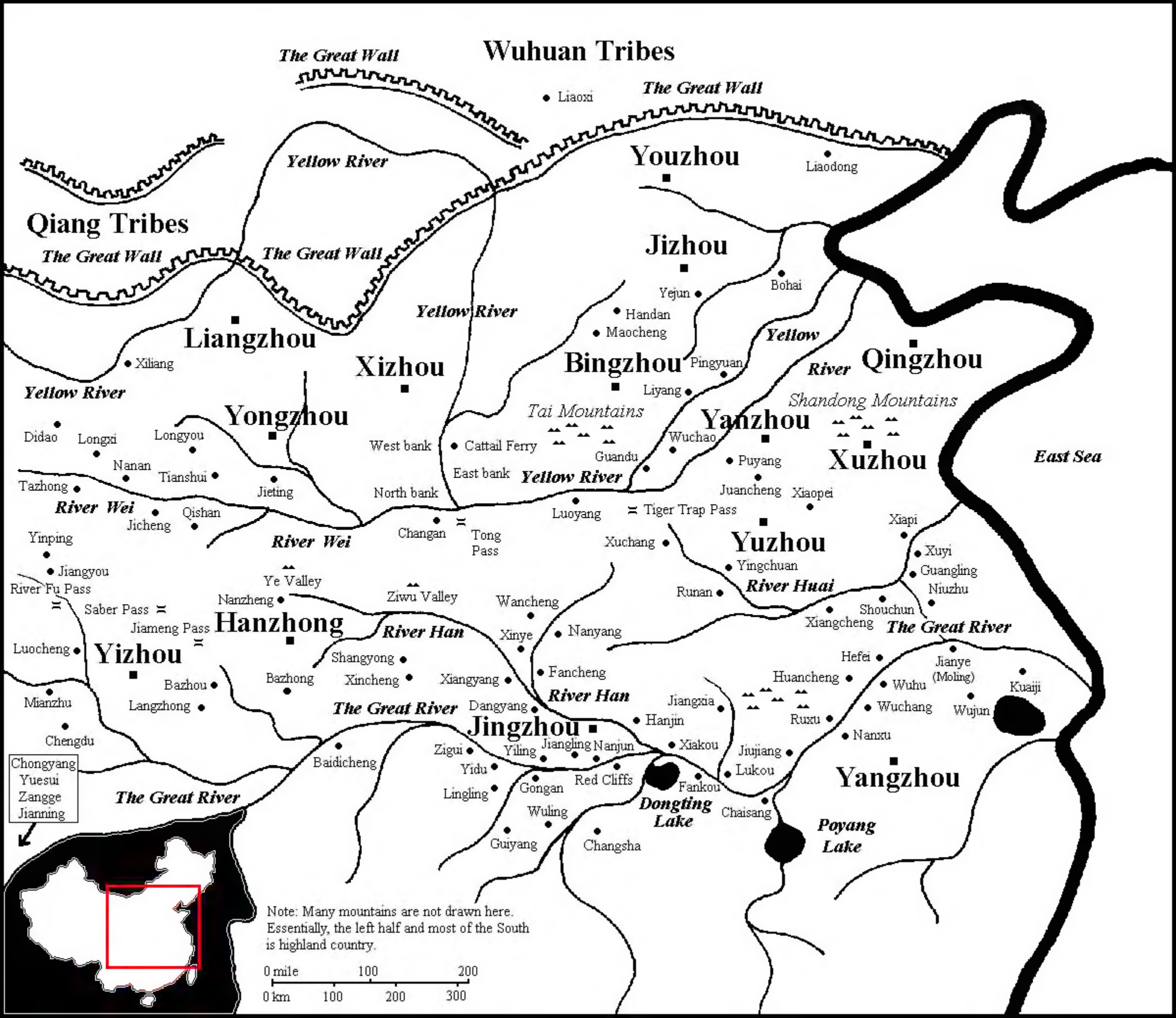
SANGOKUSHI

55

SUMMER SHOWDOWN AT QISHAN

YOKOYAMA MITSUTERU


Wuhuan Tribes
The Great Wall
The Great Wall
Liaoxi
Youzhou
Liaodong
Yellow River
Qiang Tribes
The Great Wall
The Great Wall
Jizhou
Bohai
Yejun
Handan
Maocheng
Yellow River
Liangzhou
Xizhou
Bingzhou
Pingyuan
Yellow River
Qingzhou
Xiliang
Yellow River
Liyang
Shandong Mountains
Tai Mountains
Yongzhou
Yanzhou
Didao
Longxi
Longyou
West bank
Cattail Ferry
Wuchao
Guandu
Xuzhou
East Sea
Nanan
East bank
Yellow River
Puyang
Tianshui
Tazhong
Jieting
North bank
Juancheng
Xiaopei
River Wei
Qishan
Luoyang
Tiger Trap Pass
Jicheng
Changan
Tong Pass
Xiapi
Yuzhou
Yinping
River Wei
Xuchang
Xuyi
Jiangyou
Ye Valley
Yingchuan
Guangling
River Fu Pass
Ziwu Valley
Runan
River Huai
Niuzhu
Saber Pass
Nanzheng
Wancheng
Shouchun
Jiameng Pass
Hanzhong
River Han
Xinye
Nanyang
Xiangcheng
The Great River
Luocheng
Yizhou
Shangyong
Hefei
Jianye (Moling)
Fancheng
Huancheng
Bazhou
Bazhong
Xincheng
Xiangyang
Wuhu
Kuaiji
River Han
Jiangxia
Mianzhu
Langzhong
The Great River
Dangyang
Wuchang
Wujun
Ruxu
Hanjin
Jingzhou
Chengdu
Nanxu
Zigui
Yiling
Jiangling
Nanjun
Xiakou
Jiujiang
Baidicheng
Yidu
Lukou
Yangzhou
Chongyang
Yuesui
Zangge
Jianning
Red Cliffs
Fankou
Gongan
Lingling
Dongting Lake
Chaisang
Wuling
Poyang Lake
Guiyang
Changsha
The Great River
Note: Many mountains are not drawn here.
Essentially, the left half and most of the South
is highland country.
0 mile 100 200
0 km 100 200 300

MAJOR CHARACTERS OF SANGOKUSHI

CAI MAO:
FORMER GENERAL OF LIU BIAO, WHO BECAME THE SUPREME ADMIRAL OF WEI'S NAVY WHEN JINGZHOU SURRENDERED TO CAO CAO. IN VOLUME 25, HE IS FRAMED BY ZHOU YU'S PLOT AND THUS EXECUTED BY CAO CAO.

CAO CAO MENGDE:
THE AMBITIOUS AND MACHIAVELLIAN HERO OF SANGOKUSHI. RISES TO BECOME KING OF WEI BUT DECLINES TO BECOME EMPEROR HIMSELF. PASSES AWAY FROM ILLNESS IN VOLUME 42.

CAO HONG:
YOUNGER COUSIN OF CAO CAO AND NOW HIS LOYAL GENERAL.

CAO PI:
CAO CAO'S ELDEST SON WHO SUCCEEDS TO KING OF WEI AND DETHRONES LAST HAN EMPEROR TO BECOME THE FIRST WEI EMPEROR. HE PASSES AWAY DUE TO ILLNESS IN VOLUME 49.

CAO RUI:
ELDEST SON OF CAO PI. SUCCEEDS AFTER HIS FATHER TO BECOME THE SECOND WEI EMPEROR.

CAO REN:
COUSIN OF CAO CAO AND NOW HIS LOYAL GENERAL. PORTRAYED AS BRAVE BUT HOT-TEMPERED IN THE STORY.

CHENG GONG:
A CITY GUARD CAPTAIN WHO ARRESTED CAO CAO, ONLY TO FREE AND ESCAPE WITH HIM AFTER SYMPATHIZING WITH HIS STORY. HOWEVER, HE LATER DEFECTS TO LU BU AND SERVES AS HIS ADVISOR. IN VOLUME 14, HE IS EXECUTED ALONG WITH LU BU.

CHENG YU:
IMPORTANT AND LOYAL STRATEGIST SERVING CAO CAO.

CHEN DENG:
THE SON OF CHEN GUI AND FORMERLY TAO QIAN OF XUZHOU'S SUBORDINATE. HE AND HIS FATHER SUCCESSFULLY PLOTTED LU BU'S DOWNFALL.

CHEN GUI:
FATHER OF CHEN DENG WHO SUCCESSFULLY PLOTTED LU BU'S DOWNFALL. DESPITE SECRETLY WORKING TOGETHER WITH LIU BEI AGAINST CAO CAO, CAO CAO SPARES HIS LIFE AND ALLOWS HIM TO CONTINUE LIVING IN XUZHOU.

DIAN WEI:
CAO CAO'S PERSONAL BODYGUARD, RENOWNED FOR HIS STRENGTH. HE IS ALSO KNOWN BY THE NICKNAME, "E LAI," IN REFERENCE TO THE GENERAL OF THE SAME NAME WHO SERVED UNDER KING ZHOU OF SHANG. IN VOLUME 12, HE WAS KILLED DURING ZHANG XIU'S PLOT TO KILL CAO CAO.

DIAO CHAN:
A MAID TO WANG YUN, WHO RAISED HER AS HIS OWN DAUGHTER. SHE AND WANG YUN PLOTTED TO DISTANCE LU BU FROM DONG ZHUO BY HAVING HER SEDUCE BOTH MEN. IN VOLUME 8, SHE COMMITTED SUICIDE AFTER ACCOMPLISHING HER GOAL.

DONG CHENG:
ELDER STATESMAN OF HAN WHO IS EMPEROR XIAN'S CONFIDANT. EMPEROR XIAN SECRETELY ASKS HIM TO ELIMINATE CAO CAO, WHO NOW RULES THE IMPERIAL COURT AS CHANCELLOR. IN VOLUME 17, HE IS EXECUTED AFTER HIS ASSASSINATION PLOT IS FOUND OUT BY CAO CAO.

DONG ZHUO:
GOVERNOR OF LIANGZHOU WHO LATER SEIZED CONTROL OF LUOYANG AND SEATED HIMSELF AS THE CHANCELLOR OF HAN, BECOMING AN INFAMOUS TYRANT. IN VOLUME 8, HE IS BETRAYED AND KILLED BY HIS RIGHT-HAND MAN, LU BU.

EMPRESS HE:
ORIGINALY A PEASANT, HER BEAUTY WAS NOTICED BY THE TEN ATTENDANTS AND SHE ROSE TO BECOME THE EMPRESS, UTILIZING RUTHLESS MEANS. HOWEVER, SHE AND HER SON WERE REMOVED FROM POWER AND KILLED BY DONG ZHUO WHEN HE CAME TO POWER.

FA ZHENG:
FORMER SUBJECT OF LIU ZHANG, BUT DEFECTED TO LIU BEI DURING HIS CONQUEST OF SHU. HE IS ONE OF LIU BEI'S KEY STRATEGISTS.

GAN NING:
FORMER-PIRATE WHO IS NOW A FIRECE GENERAL OF WU.

GONGSUN ZAN:
GOVERNOR OF BEIPING, WHO WAGES WAR AGAINST YUAN SHAO FOR KILLING HIS YOUNG BROTHER. IN VOLUME 15, YUAN SHAO'S ARMY CONQUERS BEIPING, CAUSING GONGSUN ZAN TO COMMIT SUICIDE.

GUAN PING:
GUAN YU'S ADOPTED SON AS OF VOLUME 19. SERVES ALONGSIDE HIS FATHER UNTIL THEIR DEATH IN VOLUME 42.

GUAN XING:
GUAN YU'S SECOND SON, WHO BECOMES A PROMINENT SHU OFFICER AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH.

GUAN YU YUNCHANG:
SWORN YOUNGER BROTHER TO LIU BEI AND SWORN OLDER BROTHER TO ZHANG FEI. AFTER THE FAILED SIEGE ON FANCHENG, HE IS EVENTUALLY CAUGHT BY WU FORCES AND PROMPTLY EXECUTED IN VOLUME 42.

GUO JIA:
THE TALENTED STRATEGIST AND ADVISOR TO CAO CAO. HE DIES FROM ILLNESS DURING CAO CAO'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE YUAN FAMILY (UNSHOWN IN MANGA).

HE JIN:
ORIGINALLY A SIMPLE BUTCHER, HE BECAME A GENERAL WHEN HIS YOUNGER SISTER ROSE TO BECOME EMPRESS HE. HE IS KILLED BY THE TEN ATTENDANTS DURING THEIR POWER STRUGGLE IN VOLUME 3.

HUANG GAI:
LOYAL GENERAL OF WU, WHOSE FAMILY HAS SERVED THE SUN FAMILY FOR THREE GENERATIONS.

HUANG ZHONG:
AN ELDERLY WARRIOR GENERAL RENOWNED ESPECIALLY FOR HIS SKILL WITH THE BOW. FORMERLY SERVED LIU BIAO AND HAN XUAN BUT DEFECTS TO LIU BEI IN VOLUME 28. FALLS IN BATTLE AGAINST WU FORCES IN VOLUME 43.

HUA XIN:
WEI MINISTER WHO RISES TO BECOME CHANCELLOR OF WEI UNDER CAO PI'S REIGN.

JIANG QIN:
GENERAL OF WU. FORMERLY A BANDIT ALONG WITH ZHOU TAI, BUT BECAME SUN CE'S SUBORDINATE OUT OF ADMIRATION FOR SUN CE'S FATHER, SUN JIAN.

JIANG WEI:
NATIVE OF JICHENG AND FAMED FOR BOTH HIS MENTAL AND MARTIAL PROWESS. ORIGINALLY SERVED WEI, BUT DEFECTED TO SHU IN VOLUME 51 AFTER KONGMING'S PLAN TURNED HIS WEI ALLIES AGAINST HIM.

JIA XU:
FORMER STRATEGIST OF ZHANG XIU, WHO PLOTTED A FAILED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON CAO CAO, WHICH LEFT DIAN WEI DEAD. AS OF VOLUME 16, HE HAS DEFECTED TO CAO CAO AND SERVES AS HIS ADVISOR.

LI DIAN:
SCHOLARLY GENERAL UNDER THE SERVICE OF CAO CAO.

LI RU:
CUNNING ADVISOR TO DONG ZHUO. WITH HIS ADVICE, DONG ZHUO FIRMLY SECURES HIS SEAT AS THE CHANCELLOR OF HAN. IN VOLUME 8, HE IS KILLED ALONG WITH DONG ZHUO WHEN LU BU BETRAYS THEM.

LIU BIAO:
THE GOVERNOR OF JINGZHOU. HE PASSES AWAY DUE TO SICKNESS IN VOLUME 22 AND THE CONSEQUENT SUCCESSION CRISIS ALLOWS CAO CAO TO TAKE OVER JINGZHOU.

LIU BEI XUANDE:
THE CENTRAL CHARACTER OF SANGOKUSHI. A VIRTUOUS MAN, WHO CLAIMS DESCENT FROM EMPEROR JING OF HAN. HE HAS SWORN AN OATH OF BROTHERHOOD WITH GUAN YU AND ZHANG FEI. HE BECOMES AN EMPEROR AND ESTABLISHES A SUCCESOR-DYNASTY TO HAN IN VOLUME 43.

LIU FENG:
LIU BEI'S ADOPTED SON. ORIGINALLY THE NEPHEW OF LIU MI, HE WAS ADOPTED UPON FIRST SIGHT BY LIU BEI WHO TOOK A LIKING TO HIM IN VOLUME 21. HE IS UNFORTUNATELY EXECUTED BY LIU BEI IN VOLUME 43 AFTER DENYING AID TO GUAN YU.

LIU QI:
ELDEST SON OF LIU BIAO WHO TEMPORARILY LOSES HIS INHERITANCE OF JINGZHOU DUE TO CAI MAO'S PLOT. IN VOLUME 29, HE PASSES AWAY FROM ILLNESS AND THE RIGHTFUL OWNERSHIP OF JINGZHOU CONTINUES TO BE DEBATED BETWEEN SUN QUAN AND LIU BEI.

LIU ZHANG:
INCOMPETENT RULER OF SHU (ALTERNATIVE NAME FOR YIZHOU). HE SEEKS LIU BEI'S HELP TO FEND OFF ZHANG LU, BUT RELATIONS SOON SOUR AND LIU BEI USURPS HIS RULE OVER SHU. AS OF VOLUME 35, HE IS EXILED TO JINGZHOU.

LU BU:
ALTHOUGH REPUTED TO BE THE STRONGEST WARRIOR, HE IS HOT-HEADED AND RARELY HEEDS WISE ADVICE. IN VOLUME 14, HE WAS BETRAYED BY HIS SUBORDINATES, AND EXECUTED BY CAO CAO.

LU MENG:
FIRECE WU GENERAL, WHO AT LAST CONQUERS JINGZHOU FOR SUN QUAN, CAPTURING GUAN YU IN DOING SO. UNFORTUNATELY DIES TO A SUDDEN ILLNESS AFTER GUAN YU'S EXECUTION IN VOLUME 42, CAUSING SOME TO THINK HE WAS CURSED.

LU SU:
IMPORTANT MILITARY GENERAL AND ADVISOR OF WU.

LU XUN:
TALENTED WU OFFICIAL WHO QUICKLY RISES TO FAVOUR AFTER SUCCESSFULLY PLANNING THE CONQUEST OF JINGZHOU.

MA CHAO:
ONE OF THE FIVE TIGER GENERALS OF SHU, WHO ONCE SOUGHT TO AVENGE HIS FATHER'S DEATH AT CAO CAO'S HANDS BEFORE ENTERING LIU BEI'S SERVICE IN VOLUME 35. HE PASSES AWAY DUE TO ILLNESS IN VOLUME 49.

MA DAI:
A NEPHEW OF MA CHAO WHO ENTERS LIU BEI'S SERVICE ALONGSIDE HIS UNCLE.

MA LIANG:
AN ADVISOR TO LIU BEI. HE IS THE FOURTH YOUNGEST OF THE FIVE MA BROTHERS, AND IS NOTED FOR HIS INTELLECT AND WHITE EYEBROWS. HE PASSES AWAY DUE TO ILLNESS IN VOLUME 46.

MA SU:
YOUNGER BROTHER OF MA LIANG, WHO, UPON REPORTING THE PASSING OF MA LIANG, CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF KONGMING AND ASSISTED THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGNS. HE HAS SINCE BECOME AN IMPORTANT STRATEGIST OF SHU.

MA TENG:
GOVERNOR OF XILIANG AND FATHER OF MA CHAO, WHO SIGNED THE BLOOD-PLEDGE TO ELIMINATE CAO CAO. IN VOLUME 30, HE IS EXECUTED FOR A FAILED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT OF CAO CAO.

MENG DA:
FORMER SUBJECT OF LIU ZHANG WHO DEFECTS TO LIU BEI, ALONG WITH HIS GOOD FRIENDS ZHANG SONG AND FA ZHENG. HE LATER DEFECTS TO WEI IN VOLUME 43, AFTER REALIZING HE WOULD BE KILLED IN SHU TO BEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR GUAN YU'S DEATH.

MENG HUO:
KING OF THE NANMAN TRIBES, WHO UNSUCCESSFULLY SUPPORTED A REVOLT IN SOUTHERN SHU. KONGMING'S SOUTHERN CAMPAIGNS WERE LAUNCHED IN RETALIATION. AFTER BEING CAPTURED AND RELEASED 7 TIMES, HE SURRENDERS AND BECOMES A LOYAL SUBJECT TO SHU.

MI ZHU:
ONE OF LIU BEI'S ADVISORS.

PANG DE:
FIERCE GENERAL WHO FORMERLY SERVED MA TENG AND THEN MA CHAO. IN VOLUME 36, HE DEFECTS TO CAO CAO'S SERVICE DUE TO A TROUBLED RELATIONSHIP WITH ZHANG LU, THE LORD OF HANZHONG. PERISHES IN THE BATTLE OF FANCHENG AGAINST GUAN YU IN VOLUME 41.

PANG TONG SHIYUAN:
NICKNAMED THE YOUNG PHOENIX (FENGCHU), HE IS A MASTERFUL STRATEGIST SAID TO BE ZHUGE LIANG'S EQUAL. AFTER ENTERING LIU BEI'S SERVICE, HE TRAGICALLY MET AN EARLY DEATH IN SHU WHEN AMBUSHED BY ZHANG REN IN VOLUME 34.

SIMA YI ZHONGDA:
IMPORTANT MILITARY STRATEGIST OF WEI SINCE CAO CAO'S REIGN. UPON CAO RUI'S SUCCESSION TO THE WEI THRONE, HE WAS BRIEFLY FRAMED FOR TREASON BY ZHUGE LIANG, BUT WAS RESTORED TO POWER IN LIGHT OF THE GROWING CRISIS OF ZHUGE LIANG'S NORTHERN CAMPAIGN AGAINST WEI.

SHUI JING:
HIS REAL NAME IS SIMA HUI BUT HE IS MORE COMMONLY KNOWN BY HIS TAOIST NAME, SHUI JING (MEANING WATER MIRROR). HE IS THE TEACHER OF ZHUGE LIANG, PANG TONG, AND XU SHU.

SUN CE:
ELDEST SON OF SUN JIAN, WHO TURNS THE SUN FAMILY'S FORTUNE AROUND WITH HIS CONQUEST OF THE SOUTH-LANDS. IN VOLUME 19, A FAILED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AND CONFLICT WITH YU JI CAUSES HIS BODY AND MENTAL HEALTH TO WEAKEN. HE SUCCUMBS TO DEATH SHORTLY AFTER.

SUN JIAN:
THE GOVERNOR OF CHANGSHA WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE ALLIANCE TO BRING DOWN DONG ZHUO. HOWEVER, HIS ALLIES LIU BIAO AND YUAN SHAO TO TURN ON HIM WHEN HE TRIES TO KEEP THE IMPERIAL SEAL FOR HIMSELF. IN VOLUME 7, HE IS KILLED IN BATTLE AGAINST YUAN SHAO.

SUN QIAN:
TRUSTED ADVISOR TO LIU BEI. (HIS ROLE IS MUCH SMALLER IN SANGOKUSHI COMPARED TO THE ORIGINAL NOVEL.)

SUN QUAN:
YOUNGER BROTHER OF SUN CE AND THE CURRENT RULER OF WU, THE SOUTHLANDS OF CHINA.

TAISHI CI:
GENERAL WHO FORMERLY SERVED LIU YAO BUT DEFECTED TO SUN CE IN VOLUME 11. DURING THE BATTLE OF HEFEI (VOL. 29), HE FALLS PREY TO ZHANG LIAO'S PLAN AND IS KILLED IN BATTLE.

TAO QIAN:
THE KIND GOVERNOR OF XUZHOU WHO ACCIDENTALLY INVOKES CAO CAO'S WRATH WHEN HIS DISLOYAL SUBORDINATE ZHANG KAI KILLS CAO CAO'S FATHER, CAO SONG. UPON HIS DEATH, HE BEQUEATHS XUZHOU TO LIU BEI.

THE TEN ATTENDANTS:
A CORRUPT GROUP OF 10 EUNUCHS WHO WERE THE HIGHEST RANKING MINISTERS OF THE IMPERIAL COURT. THEY WERE KILLED DURING THE POWER STRUGGLE WITH HE JIN IN VOLUME 4.

WANG YUN:
THE MINISTER OF THE MASSES, ONE OF THE 3 HIGHEST RANKING POSTS IN THE IMPERIAL COURT. HE SUCCESSFULLY PLOTS DONG ZHUO'S DOWNFALL USING DIAO CHAN IN VOLUME 8. HOWEVER, HE IS LATER KILLED BY REMNANTS OF DONG ZHUO'S ARMY (UNSHOWN IN MANGA).

WEI YAN:
GENERAL WHO FORMERLY SERVED LIU BIAO AND HAN XUAN BUT HAS DEFECTED TO LIU BEI ALONG WITH HUANG ZHONG IN VOLUME 28.

WEN CHOU:
HE AND YANG LIANG ARE YUAN SHAO'S TWO STRONGEST GENERALS. IN VOLUME 18, HE IS AMBUSHED BY CAO CAO'S ARMY AND KILLED BY GUAN YU.

XIAHOU DUN:
TRUSTED GENERAL OF CAO CAO. HE LOST HIS LEFT EYE DURING A BATTLE AGAINST LU BU'S ARMY IN VOLUME 13.

XU CHU:
TRUSTED BODYGUARD OF CAO CAO. ORIGINALY A PEASANT, HE WAS RECRUITED BY CAO CAO WHO WAS IMPRESSED AFTER SEEING XU CHU'S DUEL WITH DIAN WEI.

XU SHU (SHAN FU):
THE TALENTED STRATEGIST WHO STUDIED UNDER SHUI JING. AFTER A BRIEF STINT OF SERVICE TO LIU BEI, HE IS TRICKED INTO COMING TO XUCHANG AND SERVING CAO CAO (VOLUME 21).

XUN YU:
TALENTED ADVISOR TO CA CAO.

XU HUANG:
CALM AND COLLECTED GENERAL UNDER SERVICE TO CAO CAO. CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE FIVE TOP GENERALS OF WEI BY CHEN SHOU, AUTHOR OF RECORDS OF THE THREE KINGDOMS.

YAN LIANG:
HE AND WEN CHOU ARE YUAN SHAO'S TWO STRONGEST GENERALS. IN VOLUME 17, HE WAS KILLED BY GUAN YU WHILE FIGHTING CAO CAO'S ARMY AT BAIMA.

YAN YAN:
FORMER GENERAL OF LIU ZHANG BUT DEFECTED TO LIU BEI AFTER HIS CAPTURE AT ZHANG FEI'S HANDS IN VOLUME 34. HE IS NOTED FOR HIS ENERGY DESPITE HIS OLD AGE.

YU JIN:
GENERAL SERVING CAO CAO. CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE FIVE TOP GENERALS OF WEI BY CHEN SHOU, AUTHOR OF RECORDS OF THE THREE KINGDOMS.

YUAN SHAO:
OLDER BROTHER OF YUAN SHU AND THE GOVERNOR OF JIZHOU. AFTER MANY YEARS OF WARRING AGAINST CAO CAO FOR CONTROL OF NORTHERN CHINA, HE AND HIS FAMILY ARE DEFEATED.

YUAN SHU:
YOUNGER BROTHER OF YUAN SHAO AND THE GOVERNOR OF NANYANG. AFTER RECEIVING THE IMPERIAL SEAL FROM SUN CE, HE DECLARES HIMSELF AS THE EMPEROR OF ZHONG DYNASTY. IN VOLUME 15, HE DIES OF THIRST AFTER BEING ON THE RUN FROM LIU BEI AND CAO CAO'S ARMIES.

ZHANG BAO:
ELDEST SON OF ZHANG FEI, WHO RISES TO PROMINENCE AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS FATHER.

ZHANG FEI YIDE:
A FIRECE, SHORT-TEMPERED WARRIOR WHO IS THE SWORN YOUNGER BROTHER OF LIU BEI AND GUAN YU. HIS TEMPER EVENTUALLY GETS THE BETTER OF HIM, WHEN HE IS BETRAYED AND KILLED BY HIS SUBORDINATES IN VOLUME 43.

ZHANG LIAO:
ONE OF CAO CAO'S TOP GENERALS. HE WAS FORMERLY LU BU'S SUBORDINATE BUT DEFECTED TO CAO CAO AFTER THE FORMER'S EXECUTION.

ZHANG LU:
THE LEADER OF THE CELESTIAL MASTERS TAOIST MOVEMENT, AND THE RULER OF HANZHONG. IN VOLUME 36, CAO CAO CONQUERS HANZHONG BUT SPARES ZHANG LU.

ZHANG REN:
ONE OF SHU'S MOST CAPABLE GENERALS WHO PLANNED THE AMBUSH THAT KILLED PANG TONG. HE REFUSED TO SERVE LIU BEI UNLIKE MANY OF HIS COMRADES AND WAS THUS EXECUTED WHEN FINALLY CAPTURED AT THE HANDS OF ZHUGE LIANG (VOLUME 35).

ZHANG SONG:
AN ADVISOR TO LIU ZHANG WHO, UPON FAILING TO MAKE AN ALLIANCE BETWEEN CAO CAO AND LIU ZHANG, SOUGHT LIU BEI'S SUPPORT AND SWITCHED HIS ALLEGIANCE. IN VOLUME 34, HE IS EXECUTED WHEN HIS BROTHER REPORTS HIS BETRAYAL TO LIU ZHANG.

ZHANG XIU:
LORD OF WANCHENG WHO ATTEMPTED TO KILL CAO CAO DURING THE BATTLE OF WANCHENG IN VOLUME 12. AFTER YEARS OF CONFLICT AGAINST CAO CAO, HE FINALLY DECIDES TO DEFECT TO CAO CAO IN VOLUME 16.

ZHAO YUN ZILONG:
A FORMER SUBJECT OF YUAN SHAO BUT LATER DEFECTED TO SERVE GONGSUN ZAN. AFTER GONGSUN ZAN'S DEATH, HE BECOMES ONE OF LIU BEI'S MOST TRUSTED GENERALS.

ZHOU TAI:
GENERAL OF WU. FORMERLY A BANDIT ALONG WITH JIANG QIN BUT BECAME SUN CE'S SUBORDINATE OUT OF ADMIRATION FOR HIS FATHER, SUN JIAN.

ZHANG ZHAO:
ELDER STATESMAN AND SUN QUAN'S TRUSTED ADVISOR. HE ORIGINALLY ENTERED SUN CE'S SERVICE ALONG WITH ZHANG HONG, WITH WHOM HE WAS REFERRED TO AS THE "TWO ZHANGS."

ZHOU CANG:
FORMERLY A YELLOW TURBAN, HE MEETS GUAN YU IN VOLUME 18 AND BECOMES HIS SUBORDINATE. COMMITS SUICIDE AFTER LEARNING GUAN YU WAS EXECUTED IN VOLUME 42.

ZHOU YU GONGJIN:
SWORN BROTHER OF SUN CE, AND ONE OF WU'S TOP MINDS, SERVING AS THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF DURING THE BATTLE OF THE RED CLIFFS. HE RECEIVES A CRITICAL ARROW-WOUND DURING HIS NANJUN CAMPAIGN (VOL. 27) WHICH HE NEVER FULLY RECOVERS FROM, LEADING TO HIS TRAGIC EARLY DEATH IN VOLUME 30.

ZHUGE LIANG KONGMING:
MASTERFUL STRATEGIST AND FORMER STUDENT OF SHUI JING. IN VOLUME 21, HE YIELDS TO LIU BEI'S PERSISTENCE AND DECIDES TO BECOME HIS SUBJECT.

SANGOKUSHI (ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS)

三国志

VOLUME 55
SUMMER SHOWDOWN AT QISHAN

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（月刊『コミックトム』掲載）

FIRST ATTEMPT

YES, SIR.

WE'VE RECEIVED WORD FROM YONGCHENG AND MEICHENG BUT NOT WUDU OR YINPING!?

ZHUGE LIANG AND HIS MAIN CAMPS HERE ARE THE DIVERSION RIGHT NOW! HIS REAL GOAL IS TO FIRST TAKE WUDU AND YINPING!

I SEE HOW IT IS NOW! THAT EXPLAINS WHY ZHUGE LIANG HASN'T BEEN ACTIVE AS OF LATE, EVEN THOUGH HE SHOULD DESIRE A SWIFT AND DECISIVE RESULT...

YES, SIR.

YES, SIR.

I WANT YOU TWO TO TAKE 5000 TROOPS AND IMMEDIATELY GO TO AID WUDU AND YINPING. IF THE ENEMIES ARE SIEGING THOSE TWO CITIES WHEN YOU COME ACROSS THEM, YOU SHOULD BE EASILY ABLE TO ATTACK FROM THE REAR WHILE OUR GARRISON CAN SALLY OUT TO ATTACK FROM THE FRONT.

THUS, GUO HUAI AND SUN LI QUICKLY RODE TO SAVE THE BESIEGED WEI COMMANDERIES

TELL ME, SUN LI. WHO DO YOU THINK IS BETTER, ZHUGE LIANG OR SIMA YI?

HMM, THEY BOTH ARE FORMIDABLE, BUT IF I HAVE TO BE HONEST, I THINK ZHUGE LIANG IS BETTER.

HMM, I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT.

TRUE... BUT I THINK AS FAR AS THIS CAMPAIGN'S CONCERNED, SIMA YI MAY HAVE HIM OUTWITTED ONCE WE ARRIVE TO BREAK THE ENEMY SIEGE OF WUDU AND YINPING.

HA, MY FEELINGS EXACTLY.

IT'S OUR CHANCE TO GIVE IT TO HIM GOOD.

HM?

AHH!

STAY ON YOUR GUARDS, MEN!

WHAT'S A FIRE SMOKE DOING OUT HERE IN THE REMOTE HILLS?

AHAHAHA!

?

?

THANK YOU FOR MARCHING ALL THE WAY HERE WITHOUT SLEEP LAST NIGHT, GUO HUAI AND SUN LI.

HE TOLD YOU TO QUICKLY RUSH TO WUDU AND YINPING AND ATTACK MY TROOPS THERE, DID HE NOT?

DID YOU REALLY THINK I COULD NOT SEE THROUGH SIMA YI'S PLAN?

ZHUGE LIANG!

UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, BOTH WUDU AND YINPING HAVE ALREADY FALLEN INTO MY HANDS. I ADVISE YOU TWO TO GIVE UP ON THIS MEANINGLESS FIGHT AND SURRENDER WHILE YOU CAN.

ATTACK, MEN!

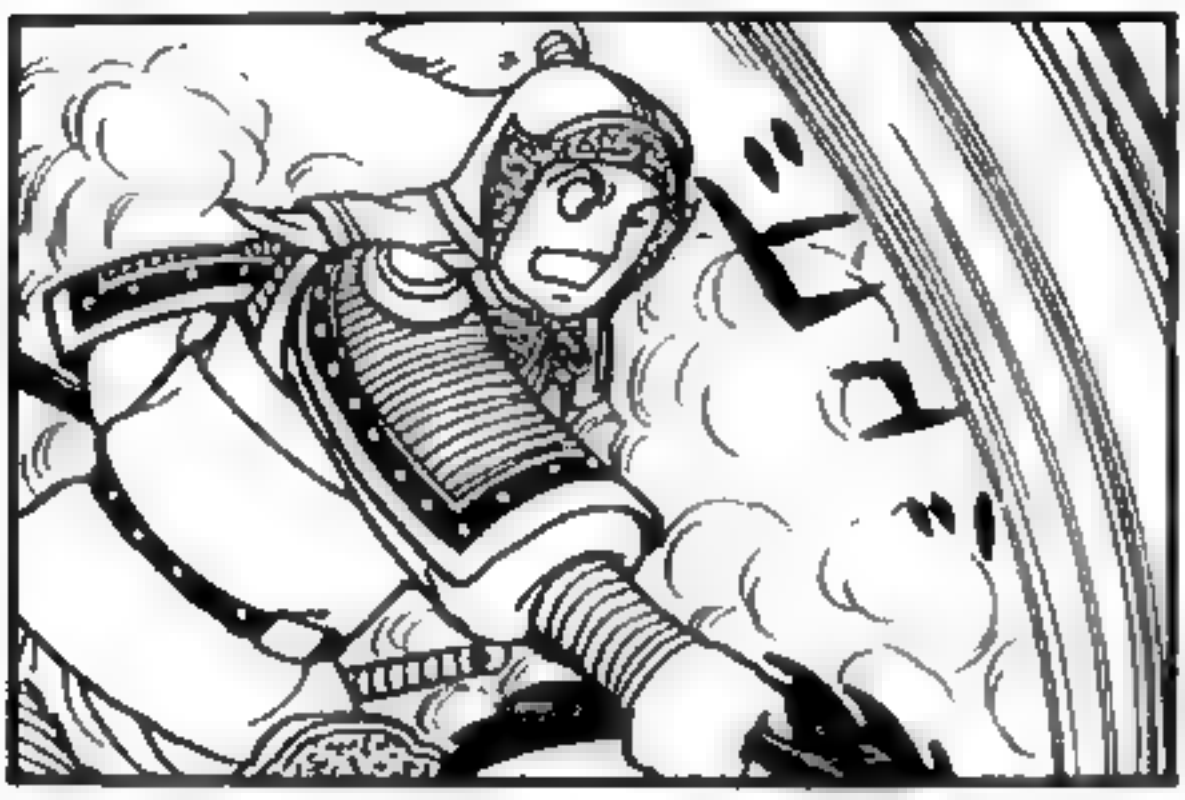
SILENCE! WHAT KIND OF GENERAL WOULD SURRENDER AS SOON AS HE MET THE ENEMY COMMANDER!?

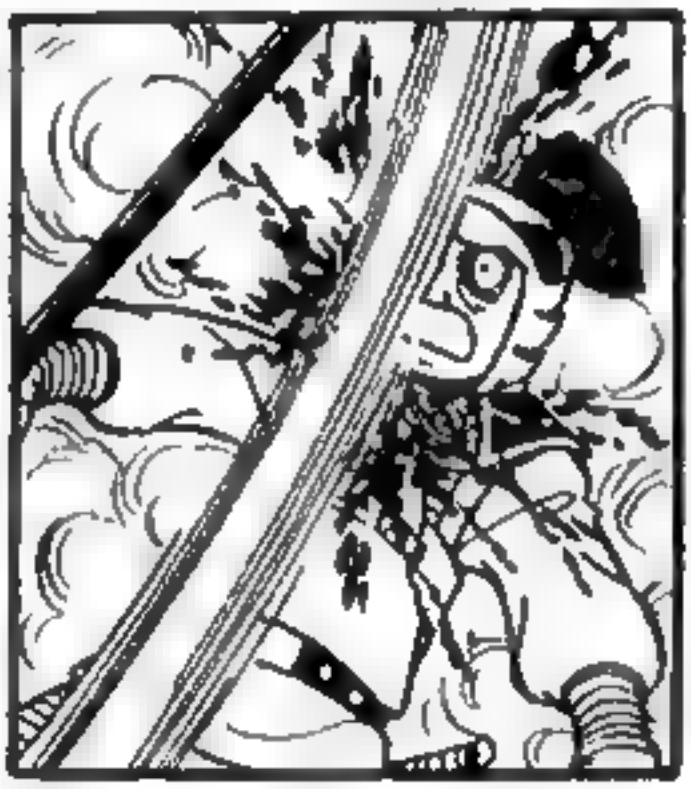
ZHANG BAO! GUAN XING!

SO BE IT THEN.

CHARGE!

LET'S GO!



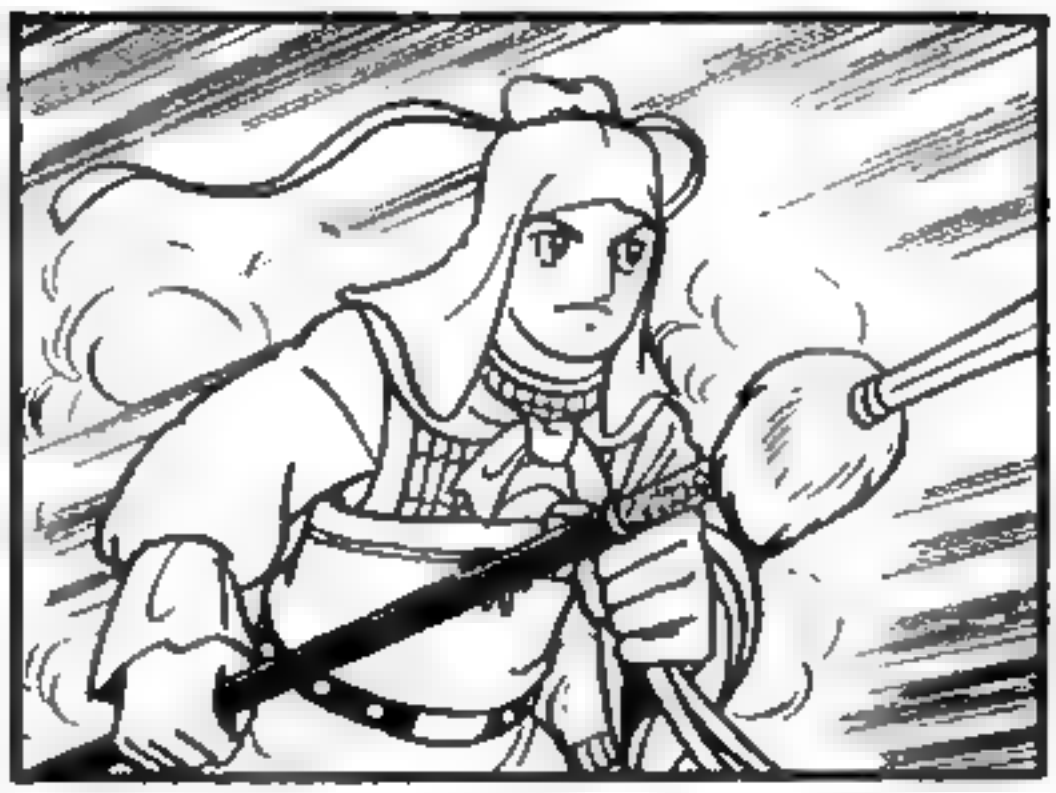


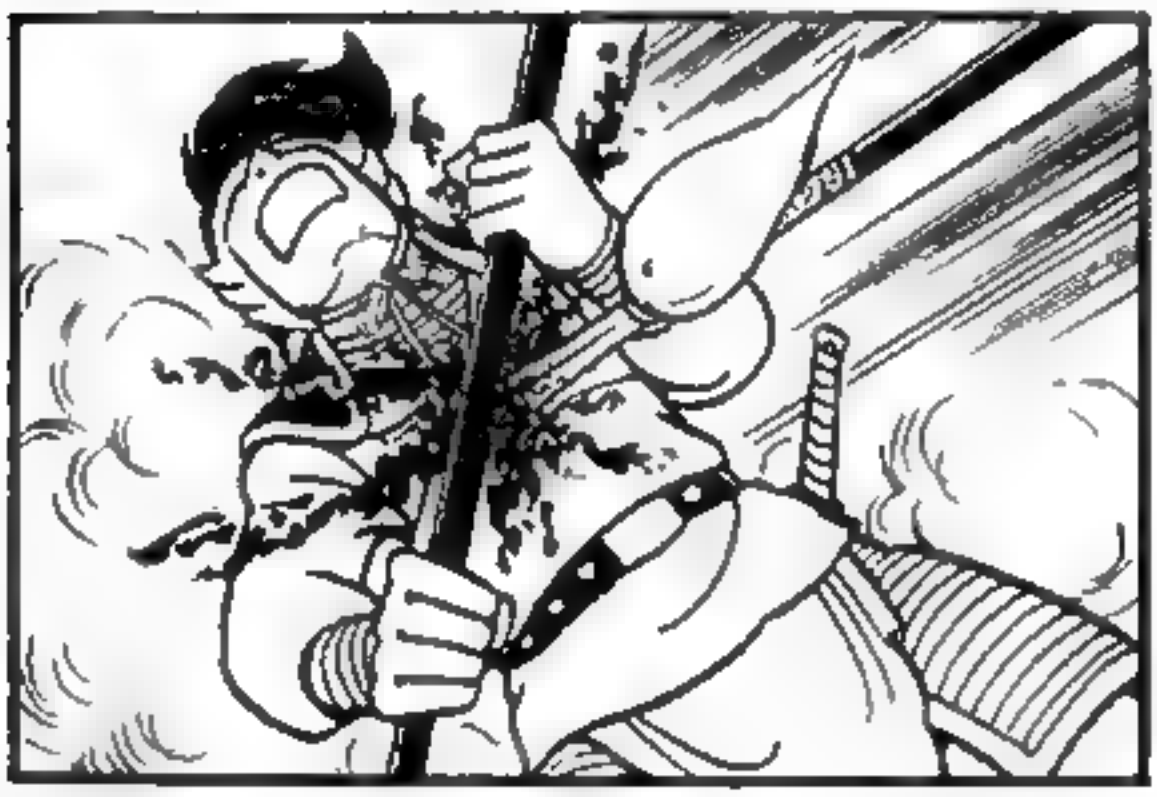
郭淮
郭淮
DON'T WAVER, MEN! IF WE CAN JUST TAKE ZHUGE LIANG'S HEAD, THIS ENTIRE WAR WILL BE OVER!

?
HM?

?
WHAT?

奔雄
兵隊





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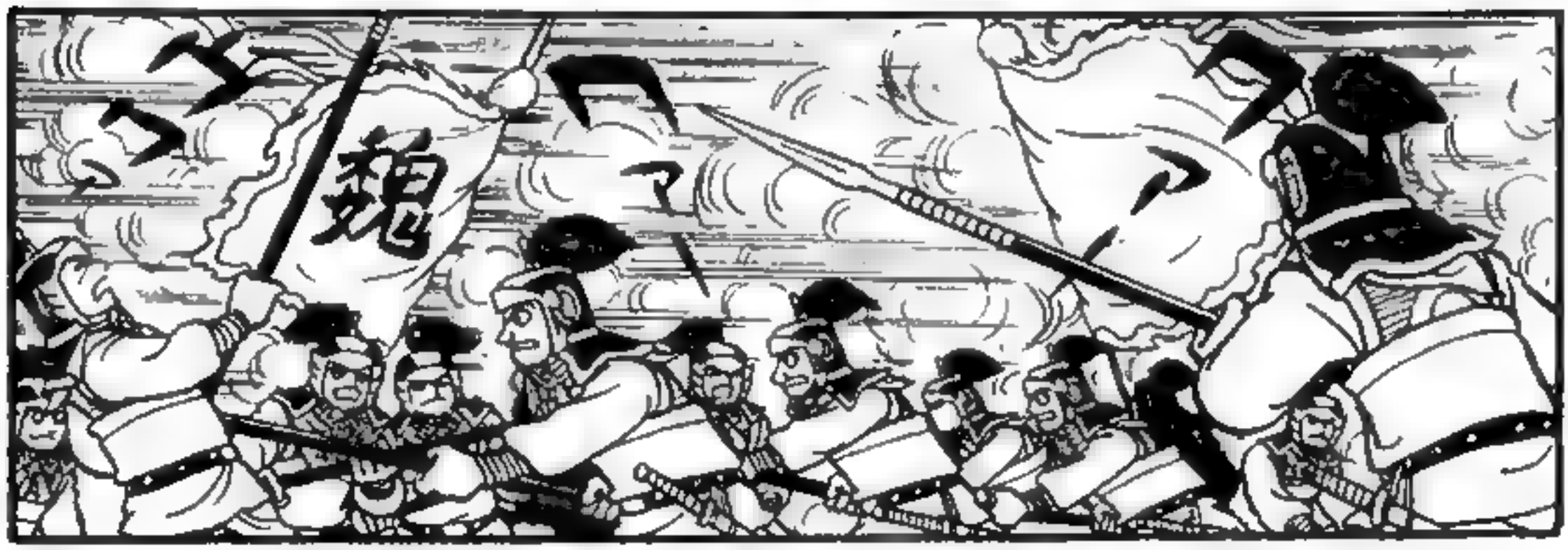
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ENEMY GENERALS WANG PING AND JIANG WEI HAVE APPEARED TO OUR REAR!

WHAT'S GOING ON!?

RETREAT THROUGH THE HILLS!

NGHH...

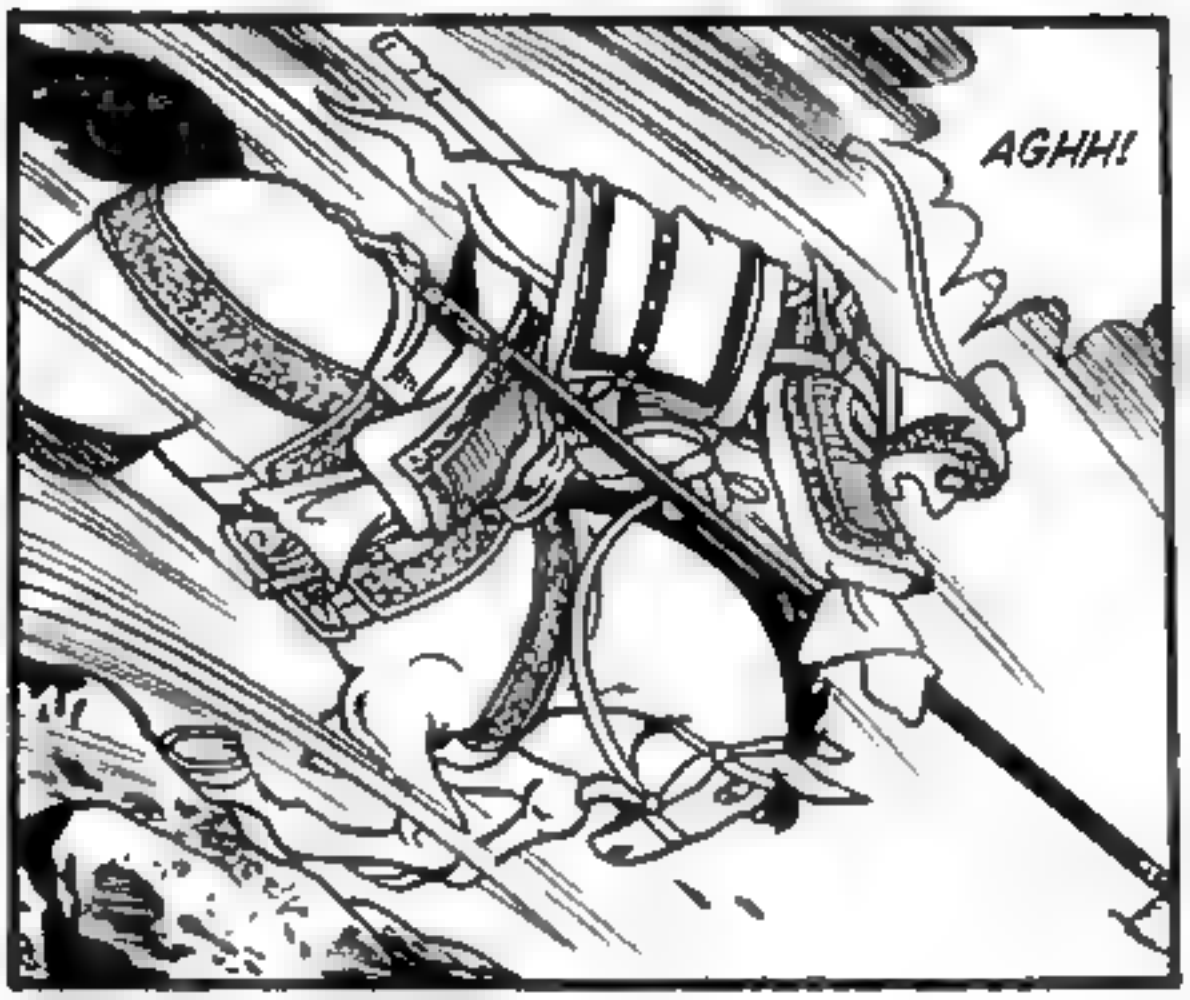
WE'LL BE ANNHILATED AT THIS RATE, SIR!

郭嘉
張遼
I WON'T LET YOU ESCAPE THAT EASILY!

AH!

OH
NO!

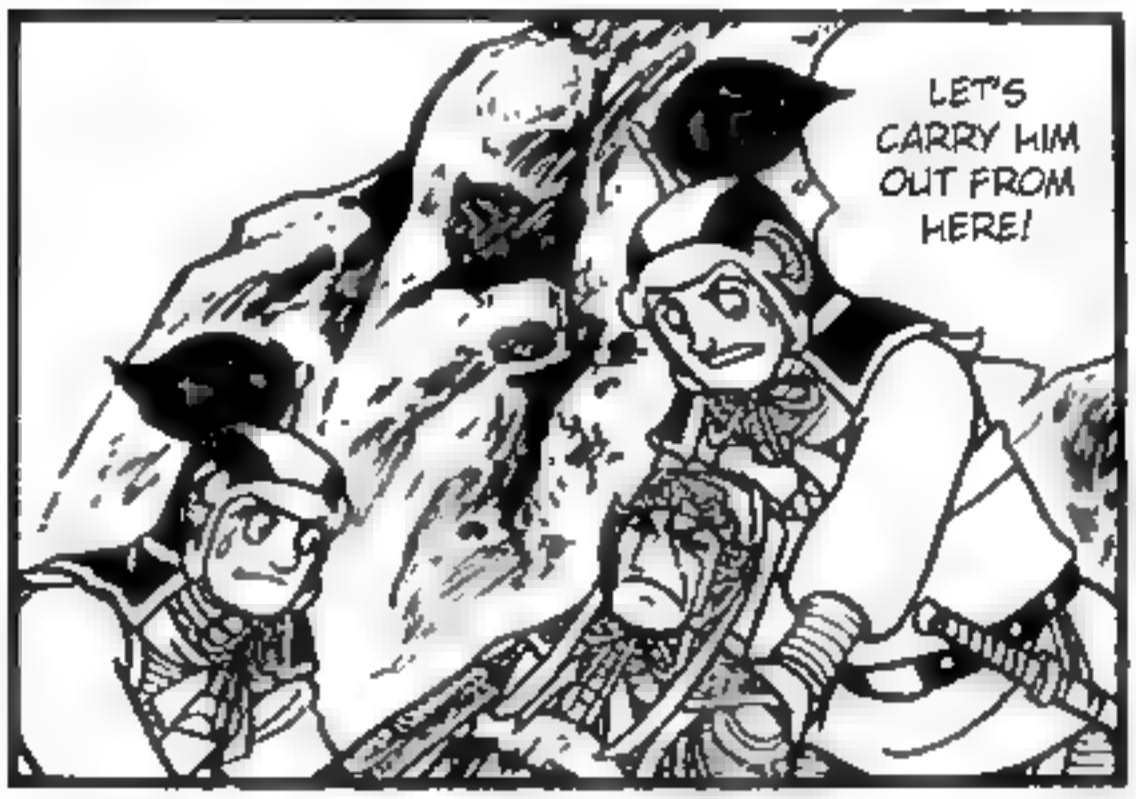
FASTER!


AGHH!

QUICKLY, MEN!

GENERAL!

GENERAL ZHANG BAO!


LET'S CARRY HIM OUT FROM HERE!

OH NO, HE LOOKS BADLY INJURED...

ZHANG BAO! ARE YOU ALRIGHT!?

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING. JUST DO YOUR BEST TO RECOVER BACK AT THE CAPITAL.

FORGIVE ME, SIR... FOR SLIPPING UP AT SUCH A CRUCIAL TIME...

YES, SIR...

YOU CAN ALWAYS FIGHT FOR YOUR EMPIRE AGAIN AFTER YOU'RE WELL.

YES, SIR.

TAKE ZHANG BAO BACK TO THE CAPITAL AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE SO HE CAN GET THE FINEST MEDICAL CARE.

HIS WOUNDS ARE MUCH MORE SERIOUS THAN I EXPECTED...

魏 夫人

女儿

YES, WE HAD HIM IN OUR SIGHTS BUT WE WERE UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING BUT ESCAPE...

WUDU AND YINGPING HAVE ALREADY FALLEN, AND ZHUGE LIANG WAS WAITING TO AMBUSH YOU!?

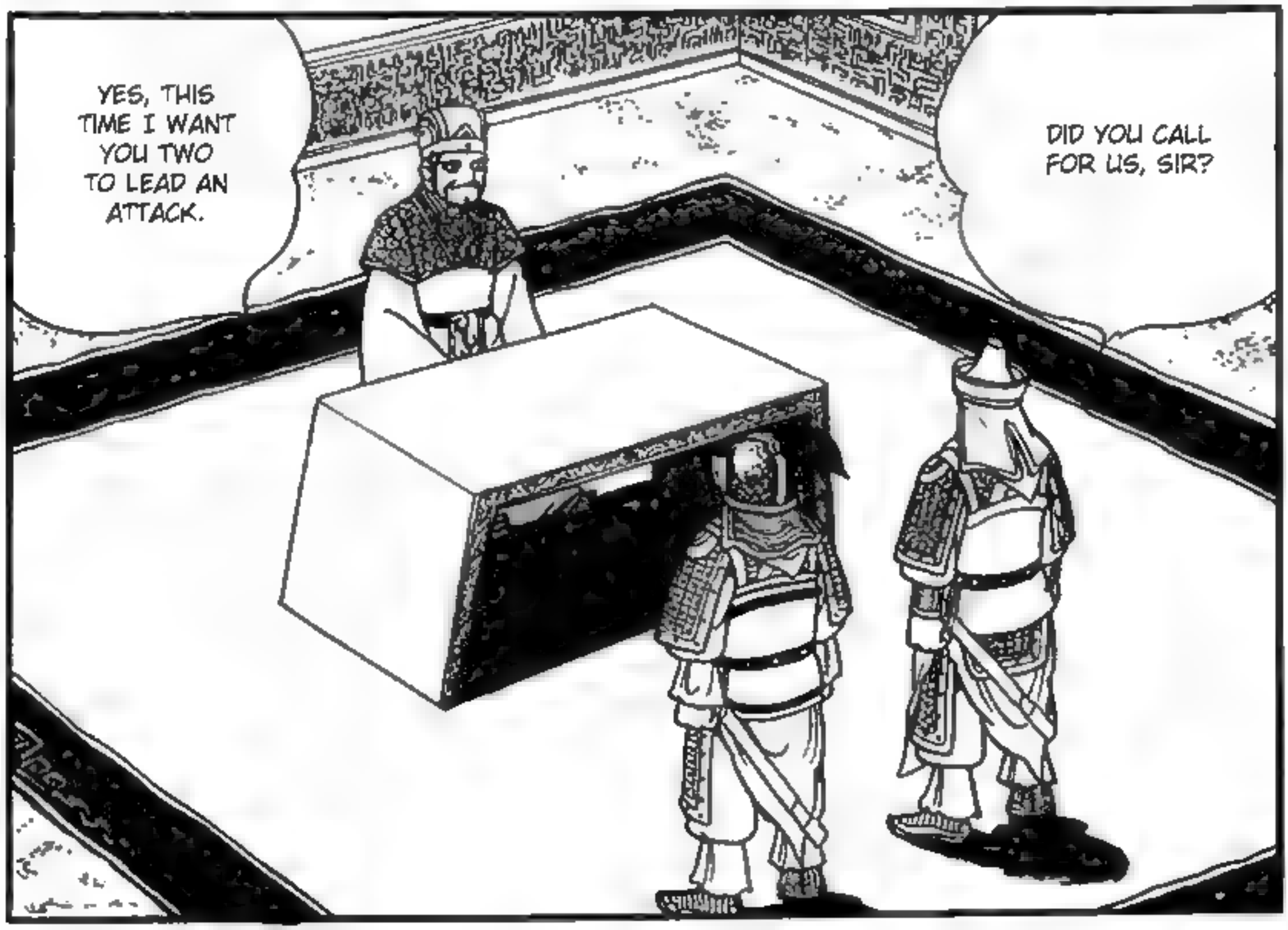
YES, SIR.

BUT I STILL HAVE OTHER PLANS SO DO NOT LOSE HEART. RETURN TO YONGCHENG AND MEICHENG FOR NOW AND DO YOUR BEST TO DEFEND THEM.

NO, YOU ARE BLAMELESS. THE FAULT LIES WITH ME FOR BEING BESTED BY ZHUGE LIANG'S FORESIGHT.

FEARSOME AS EVER, KONGMING...

SECOND ATTEMPT



THUS, YOU ARE TO EACH TAKE 10,000 TROOPS AND HEAD AROUND TO THE REAR OF THE MAIN ENEMY CAMP TONIGHT AND ATTACK.

WUDU AND YINPING MAY HAVE BEEN CAPTURED, BUT MY ASSUMPTION IS THAT THERE IS STILL UNREST FROM THE CIVILIANS, REQUIRING ZHUGE LIANG TO LEAVE HIS CAMPS TO GO REASSURE THE POPULACE.

WITH A THREE-PRONGED ATTACK, THE ENEMIES WILL BECOME DISORGANIZED AND WE WILL CAPTURE THEIR MAIN CAMP.

MEANWHILE, I WILL LEAD THE ATTACK FROM THE FRONT.

YES, SIR. WE'LL PREPARE THE TROOPS FOR A NIGHT ATTACK.

THEIR OTHER TWO CAMPS WILL EASILY FALL ONCE WE GAIN CONTROL OF THEIR MAIN ONE.

THAT NIGHT, ZHANG HE AND DAI LING LED 10,000 TROOPS EACH,

TO THE REAR OF QISHAN

AFTER GIVING ENOUGH TIME FOR THEM TO GET IN POSITION
SIMA YI, TOO, LED AN ARMY OUT TO MEET THE SHU ARMY HEAD ON

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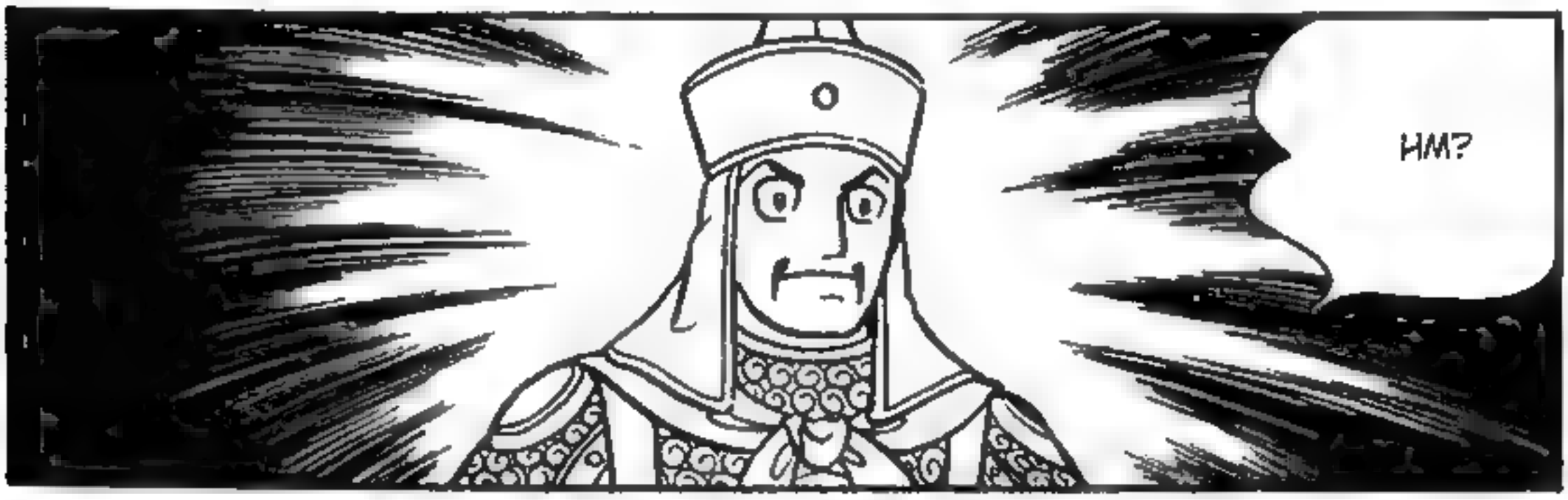

HM?

IF THERE'S A BLOCKADE HERE, THAT MEANS THE ENEMIES WILL BE READY TO RESPOND TO ANYONE WHO TRAVELS THROUGH THIS ROAD.

A WAGON BLOCKADE ALL THE WAY OUT HERE?

AHH!

YES.

A SURPRISE ATTACK IS OUT OF THE QUESTION THEN. I SUGGEST WE RETREAT.

HAHA. DID SIMA YI THINK THAT I LEFT THE CAMPS BECAUSE I WAS BUSY ATTENDING MATTERS IN WUDU AND YINPING? AS YOU ARE ALREADY IN MY TRAP, I SUGGEST YOU DISMOUNT AND SURRENDER.

AH!

AHH!

HOW DARE YOU INVADE OUR GREAT EMPIRE AND TALK DOWN TO ME! I WILL TAKE YOUR HEAD AS JUST COMPENSATION!

NGHH!

張郃

ATTACK!

MEN!

A MERE DISPLAY OF RASH COURAGE.

RETREAT!

AGHH!

張郃

DAI LING!? WHERE ARE YOU!?

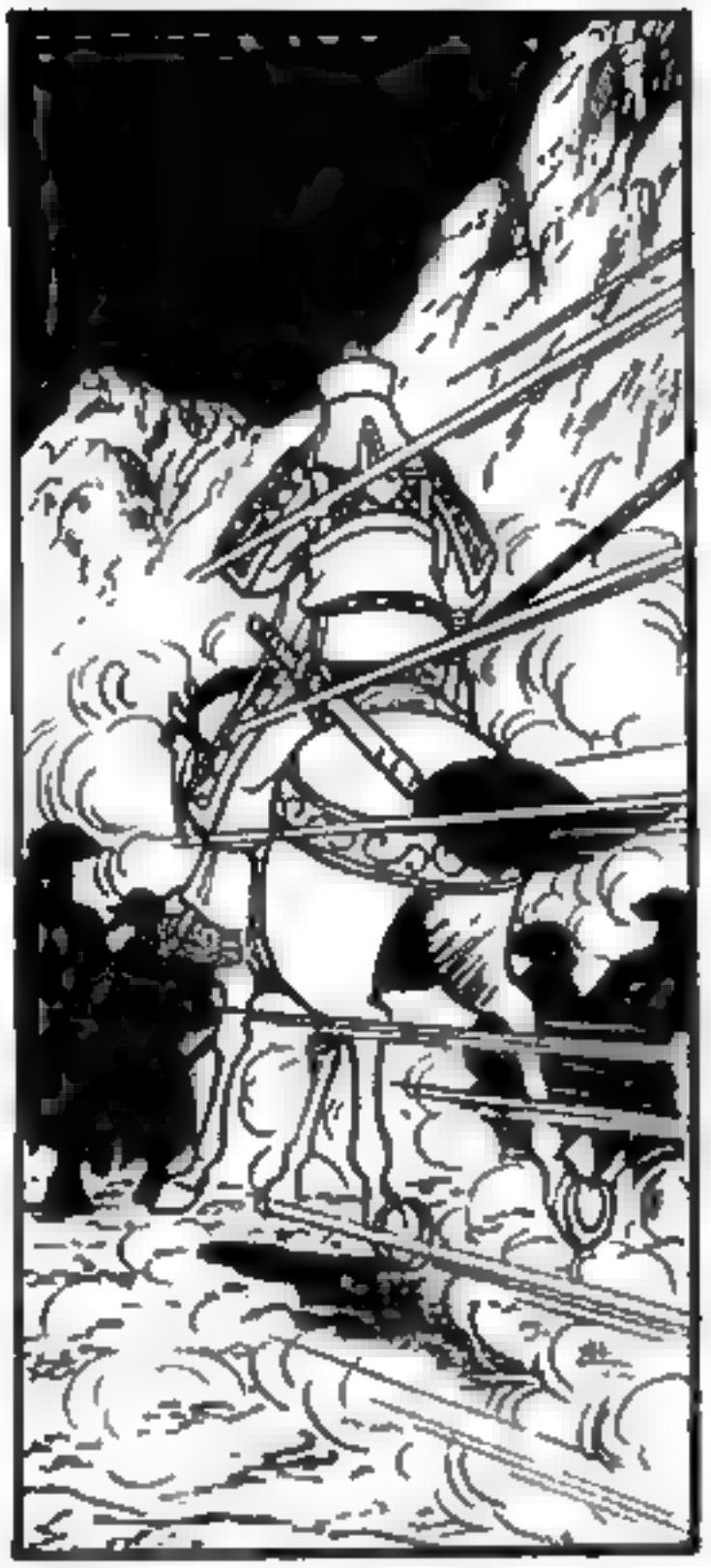
HM?

I WON'T LET HIM DIE ON MY WATCH!

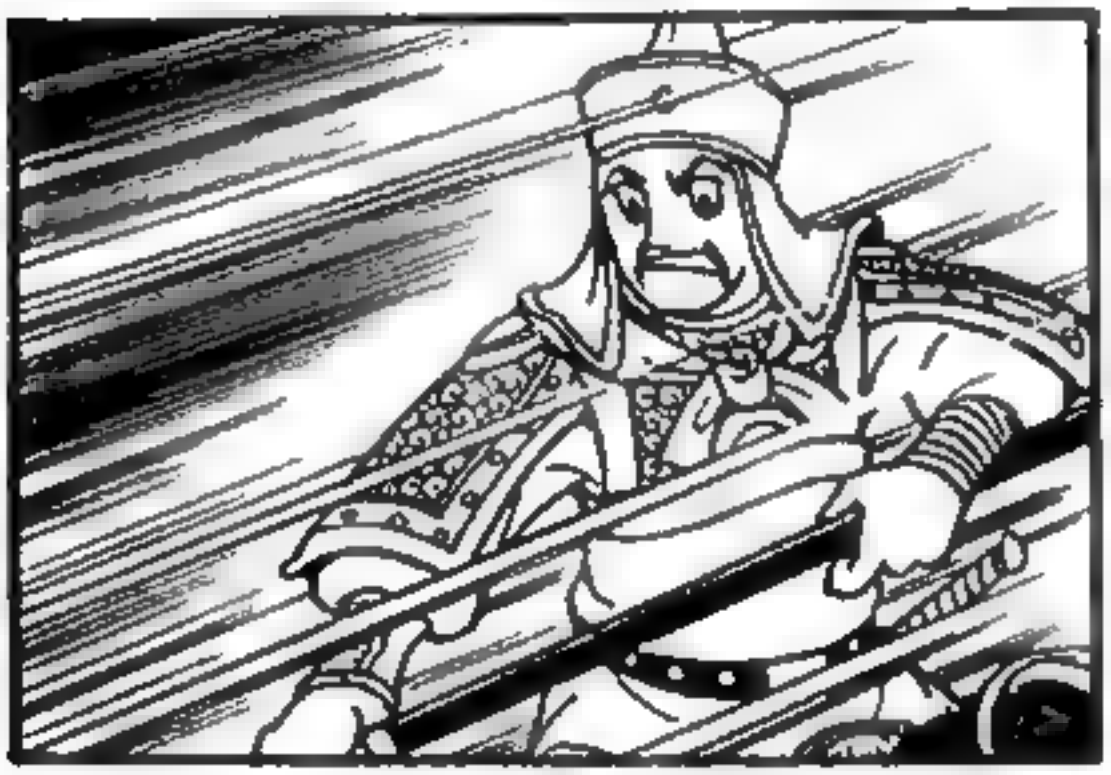
WHAT!

GENERAL DAI LING IS SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES, SIR!

SIR!?



PROTECT GENERAL ZHANG HE!



GET OUT OF MY WAY!

OVER HERE!

DAI LING! ANSWER ME, DAI LING!

RIGHT!

WE CAN'T STAY HERE ANY LONGER!

MOVE IT!

RIGHT BEHIND YOU!

LET'S GO!

HMM...

IF HE IS NOT RID OF, HE WILL SURELY BE A GREAT THREAT TO SHU.

LONG AGO, I HEARD ZHANG FEI AND ZHANG HE FOUGHT TO A STANDSTILL, ALLOWING SOME TO CLAIM IF ZHANG FEI STANDS TALL IN SHU, THEN ZHANG HE STANDS TALL IN WEI. HAVING JUST SEEN HIS VALOUR, I SEE NOW THAT THE CLAIMS WERE TRUE.

IN ANY CASE, THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TONIGHT. GIVE THE SIGNAL TO WITHDRAW.

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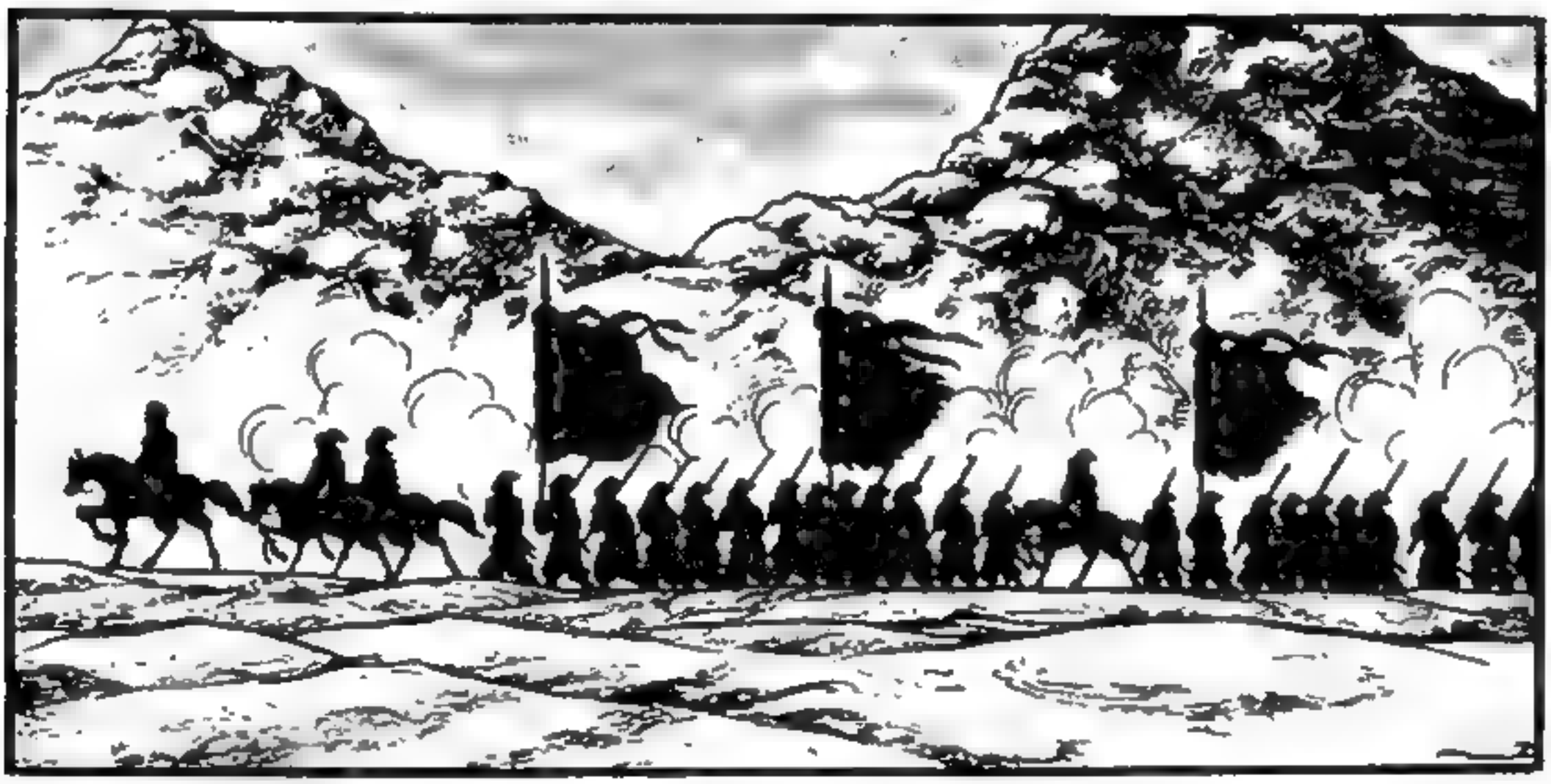
司馬

YES, AND HE WAS WAITING TO AMBUSH US AT THE REAR OF QISHAN LAST NIGHT.
ZHUGE LIANG IS STILL HERE!?
司馬

THERE'S NOT MUCH WE CAN ACCOMPLISH WITH A SIMPLE HEAD-ON ATTACK THEN.
AGAIN, HE PREDICTED MY PLANS AND BESTED ME. HIS FORESIGHT IN WAR BORDERS THE DIVINE.
WE WILL RETREAT BACK TO OUR CAMP!



AFTER THIS SECOND DEFEAT, SIMA YI SWITCHED TO DEFENSE AND DID NOT VENTURE OUT FROM HIS CAMP.

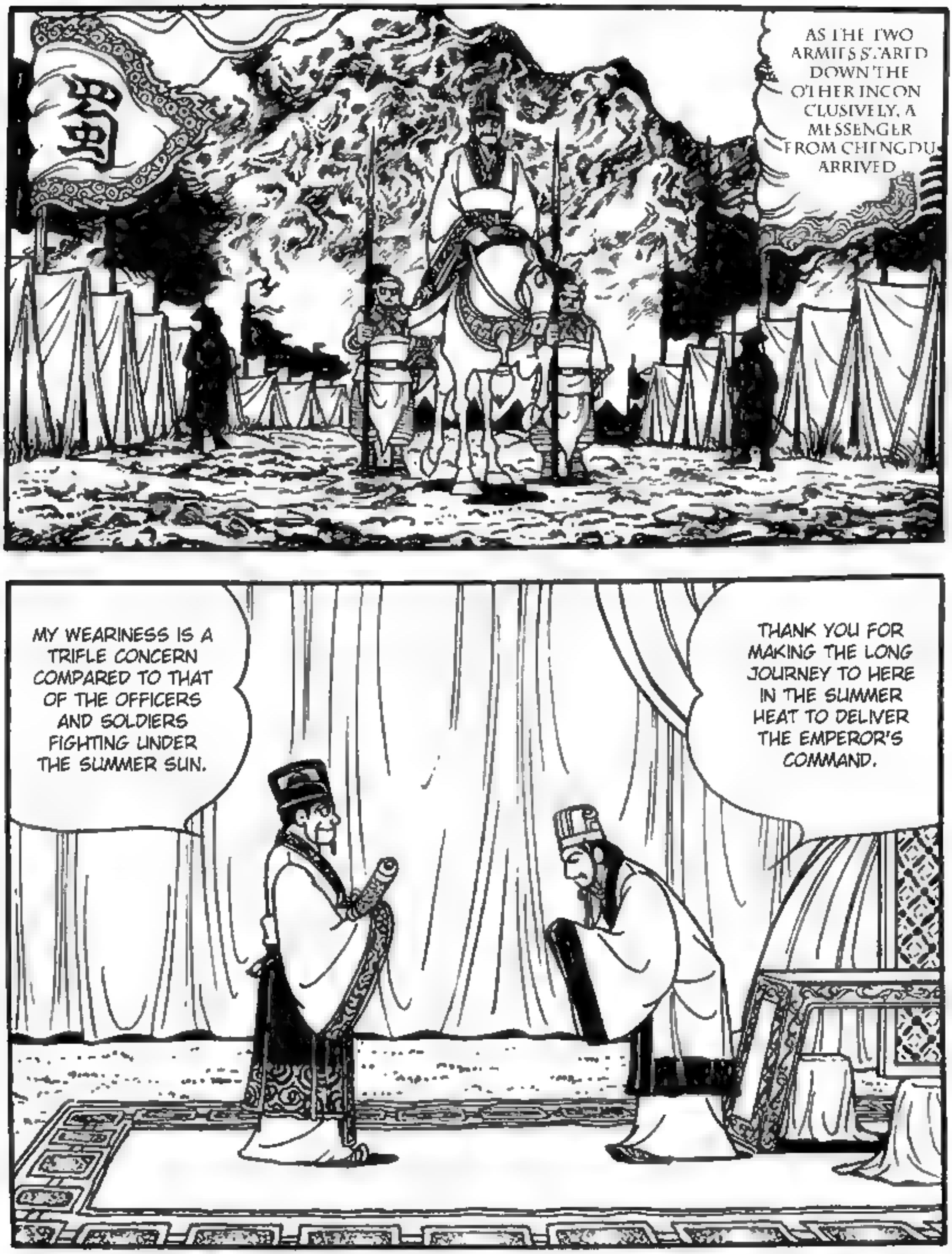
FOR HALF A MONTH, WEI YAN LED HIS TROOPS OUT TO TAUNT AND BAIT OUT THE WEI TROOPS BUT WITH NO SUCCESS

NO INSULTS OF ANY KIND ARE WORKING, SIR.

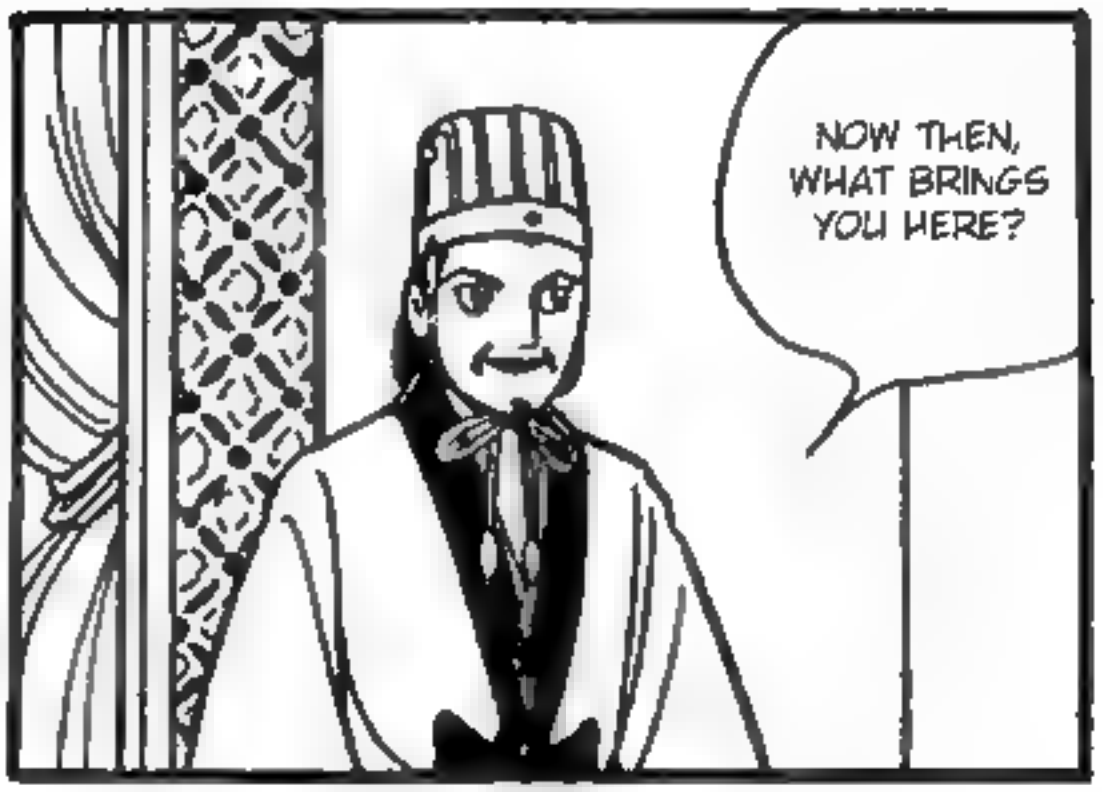
NO RESPONSE AGAIN?

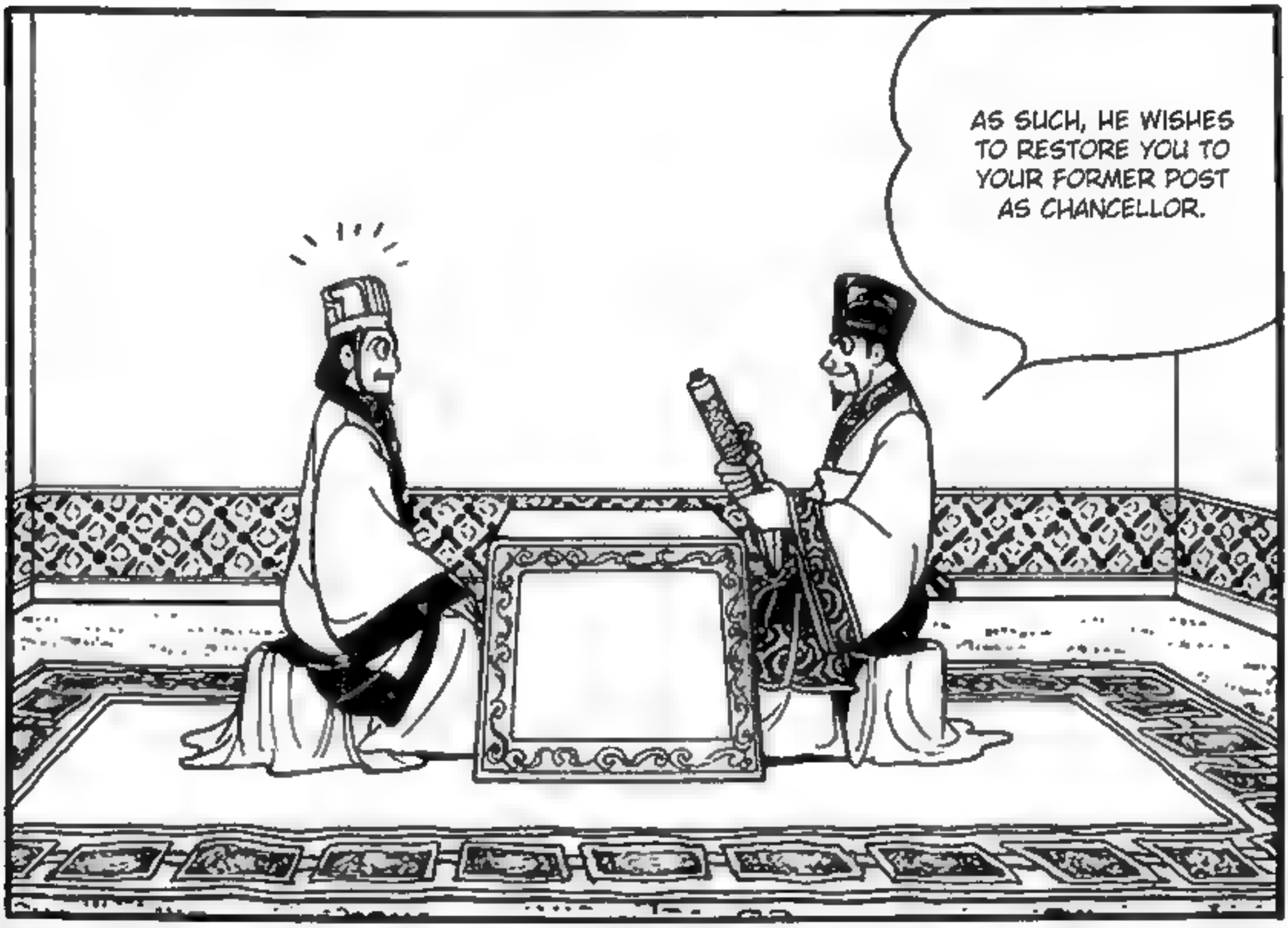
THIS IS QUITE TROUBLING... I CAN MANIPULATE AND HERD A MOVING ENEMY INTO TRAPS, BUT THERE IS LITTLE I CAN DO AGAINST AN UNMOVING ENEMY...

BREAKING CAMP


AS THE TWO ARMIES STARTED DOWN THE OTHER INCONCLUSIVELY, A MESSENGER FROM CHENGDU ARRIVED
MY WEARINESS IS A TRIFLE CONCERN COMPARED TO THAT OF THE OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS FIGHTING UNDER THE SUMMER SUN.
THANK YOU FOR MAKING THE LONG JOURNEY TO HERE IN THE SUMMER HEAT TO DELIVER THE EMPEROR'S COMMAND.

NEWS OF YOUR RECENT SUCCESSES HAVE GREATLY DELIGHTED HIS MAJESTY.


NOW THEN, WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?


AS SUCH, HE WISHES TO RESTORE YOU TO YOUR FORMER POST AS CHANCELLOR.

NO, THE EMPEROR RECOGNIZES THAT IT WAS MA SU WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISASTER AT JIETING. THERE IS NO NEED FOR YOU TO STILL BE HUNG UP OVER THAT.

NO, I CANNOT ACCEPT. WHAT FEW SUCCESSES I HAVE ACHIEVED ARE MINOR AND I AM STILL FAR FROM ACTUALLY FULFILLING MY TASK.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE SOLDIERS THEMSELVES ALL EAGERLY DESIRE TO SEE YOU RESTORED AS CHANCELLOR. REJECTING THE POST MAY AFFECT THEIR MORALE.

VERY WELL, IF THAT IS HOW HIS MAJESTY AND THE TROOPS FEEL, THEN I WILL RELENT.

EVEN HIS MAJESTY WISHES NOTHING MORE THAN TO HAVE YOU AS HIS CHANCELLOR AGAIN. WHY DO YOU STILL RESIST AGAINST THE FEELINGS OF SO MANY?

I HUMBLY ACCEPT.

EXCELLENT. BY THE AUTHORITY OF HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, I HEREBY REINSTATE YOU AS THE CHANCELLOR OF SHU.

THUS, KONGMING BECAME CHANCELLOR ONCE MORE
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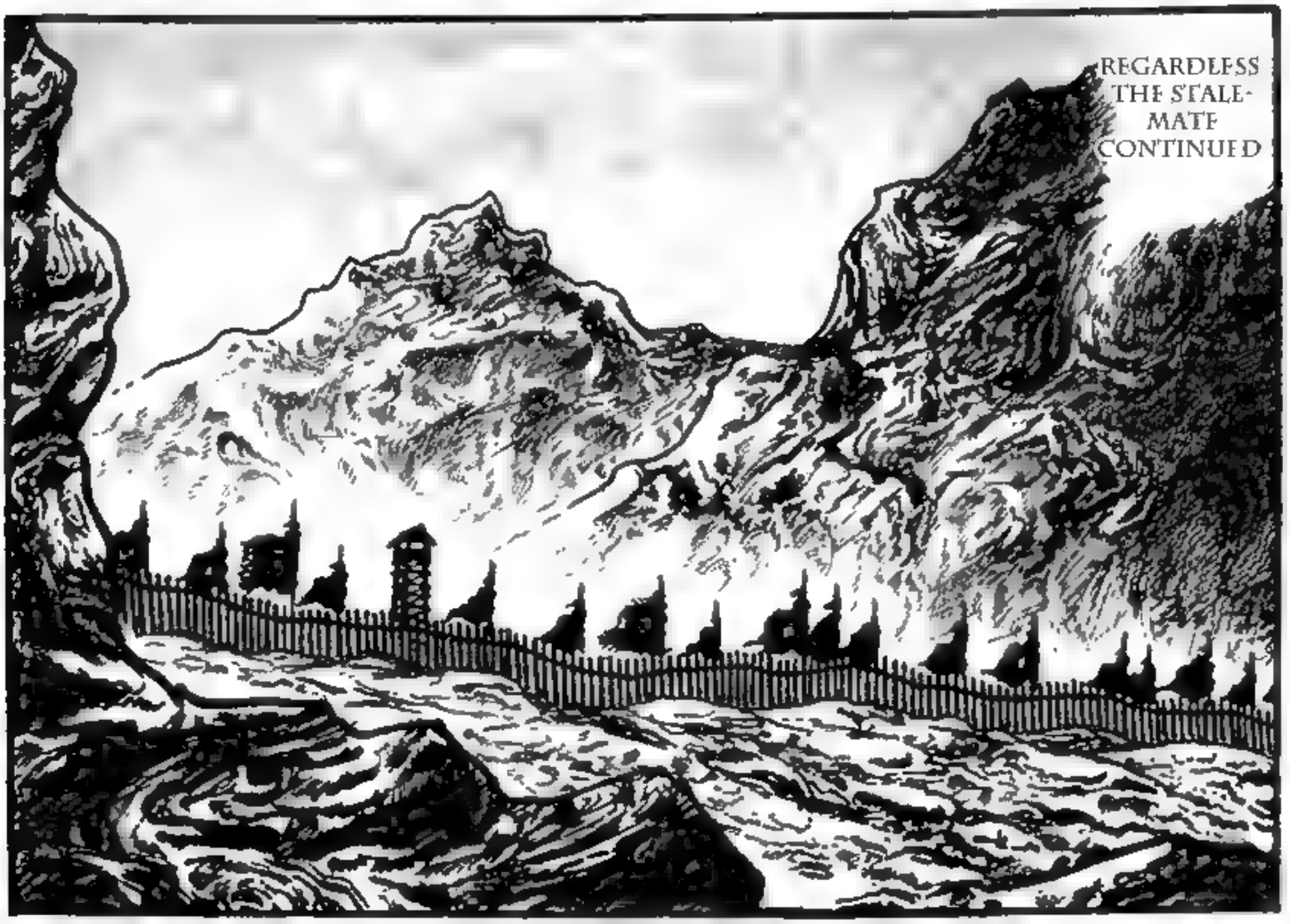
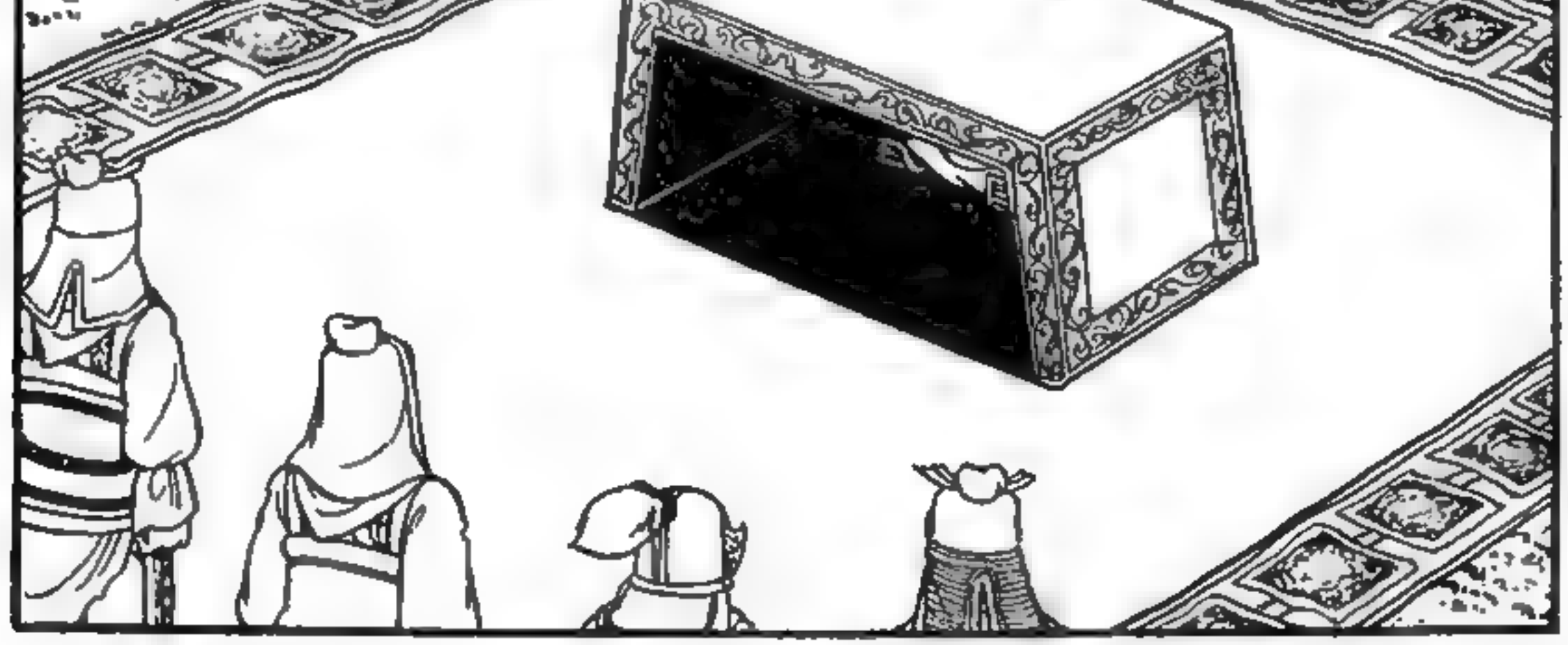

REGARDLESS THE STALE-MATE CONTINUED

GENTLEMEN, I AM CONSIDERING BREAKING CAMP.


YES, WE HAVE THE UPPER HAND FOR NOW AND WE STILL HAVE PLENTY OF FOOD LEFT.
WHAT WOULD CAUSE YOU TO CONSIDER SUCH A THING, CHANCELLOR?

MY CURRENT PRIORITY IS IN BAITING THE ENEMIES TO COME OUT FOR A QUICK AND DECISIVE BATTLE.

YES, BUT IF THE ENEMIES DO NOT MOVE, THEN THE STALEMATE COULD CONTINUE FOR WELL OVER A YEAR. AT SOME POINT EVENTUALLY, WE WILL RUN OUT OF FOOD.

BUT WILL WE NOT BE DISADVANTAGED BY FIGHTING WHILE ON THE RETREAT?

IF WE BREAK CAMP AND RETREAT, THE ENEMIES WILL LIKELY COME OUT TO PURSUE US.

YES, I'VE CONSIDERED THE DANGERS.

BUT I'M WILLING TO TAKE THE RISK.

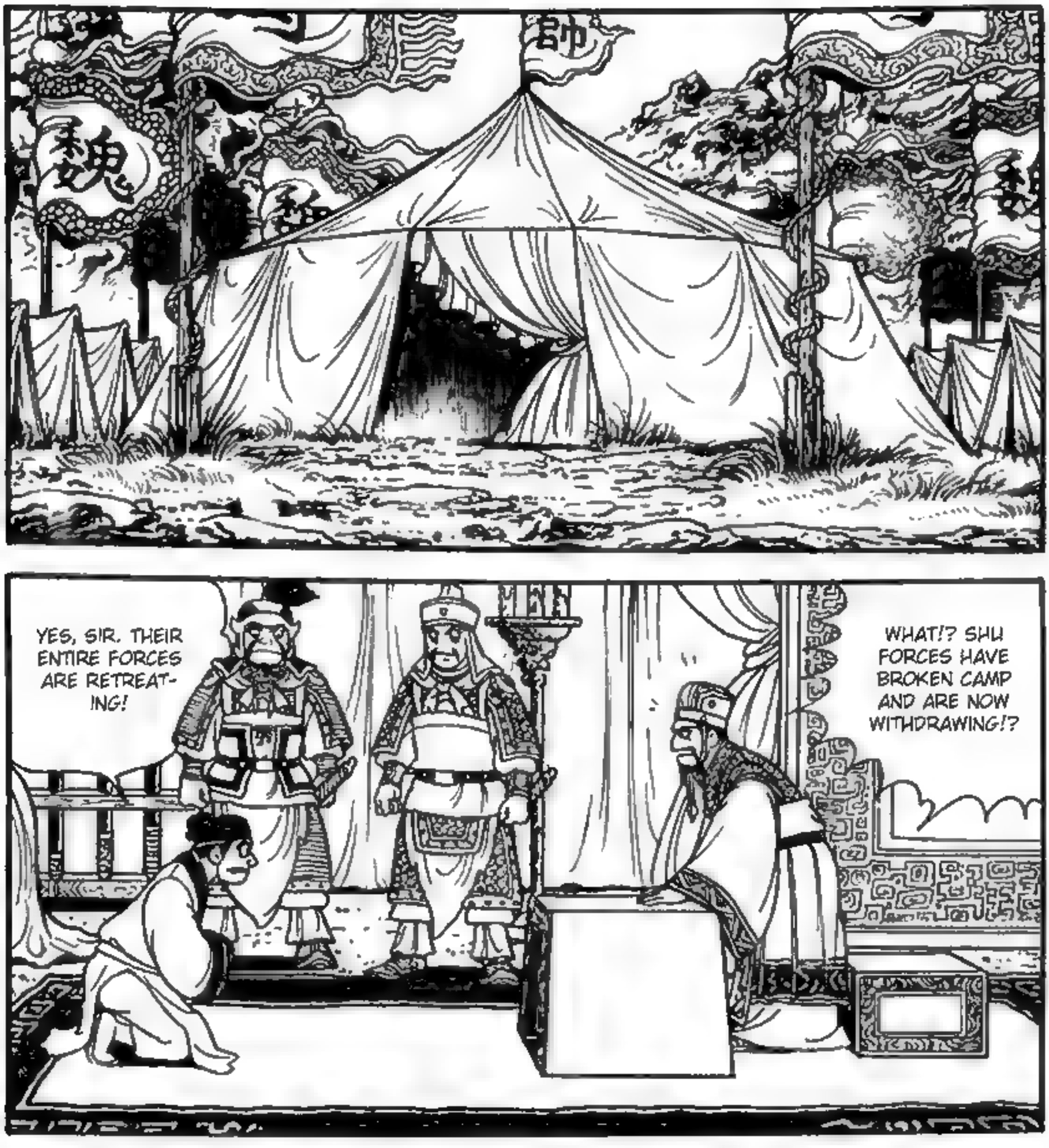
YES, SIR.

SO PLEASE PREPARE TO BREAK CAMP AND WITHDRAW.

HE'S RIGHT THOUGH ABOUT OUR DWINDLING SUPPLIES. UNLESS WE WANT TO RETREAT TO HANZHONG AGAIN, WE HAVE TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO BAIT THE ENEMIES OUT...

EVEN THE EVER-CAUTIOUS CHANCELLOR IS WILLING AT LAST TO MAKE A HIGH-STAKES GAMBLE.

STILL, THE POSSI-BILITY OF AN ATTACK WHILE RETREATING IS NOTHING TO SCOFF OVER. EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US MUST PREPARE FOR THE WORST.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YES, SIR. THEIR ENTIRE FORCES ARE RETREAT-ING!
WHAT!? SHU FORCES HAVE BROKEN CAMP AND ARE NOW WITHDRAWING!?
NO, WAIT! THIS MAY BE ZHUGE LIANG'S TRAP!
COMMANDER! WE MUST PURSUE THEM AT ONCE!

WHAT!? THE ENEMIES ARE CLEARLY WITHDRAWING DUE TO PROBLEMS WITH FEEDING THEIR TROOPS AGAIN. NOW IS OUR ONLY CHANCE TO DELIVER A DECISIVE BLOW!

I BEG YOUR PARDON, SIR?

IF THAT'S THE FIRST CONCLUSION YOU COME TO, THEN PURSUING THEM SOUNDS EVEN MORE DANGEROUS.

HENCE, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT ZHUGE LIANG IS ONLY FEIGNING THIS RETREAT IN ORDER TO BAIT US OUT FOR BATTLE. IF WE GO AFTER THEM IN PURSUIT, WE WILL FALL EXACTLY INTO HIS HANDS.

HANZHONG SHOULD HAVE HAD A BOUNTIFUL HARVEST LAST YEAR. IF THEY LACK GRAIN, THEN THE PROBLEM LIES WITH TRANSPORTING THEIR PLENTIFUL GRAIN. EVEN SO, I ESTIMATE THE ENEMIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO HOLD OUT HALF A YEAR AT LEAST.

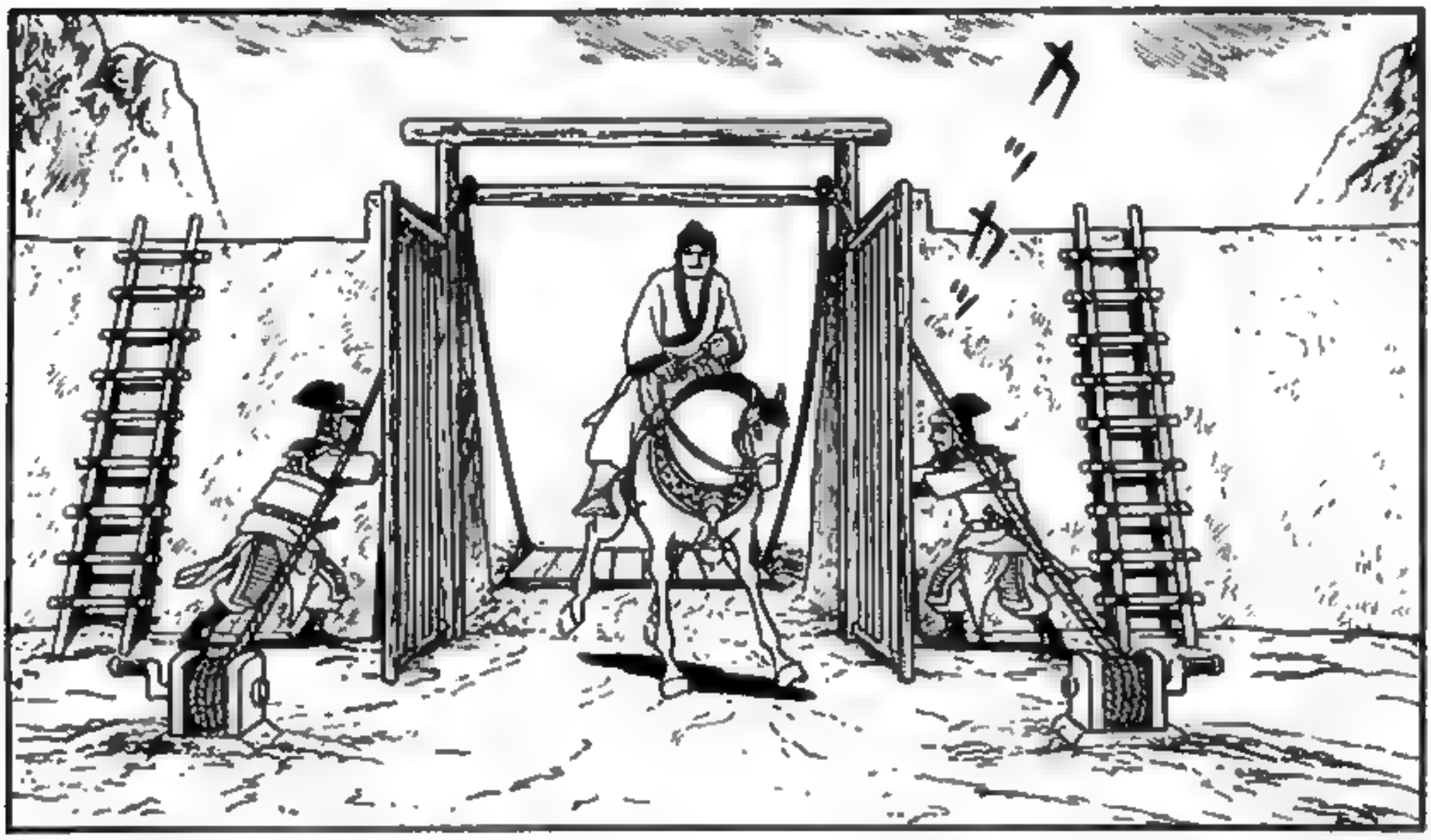
YES, SIR...

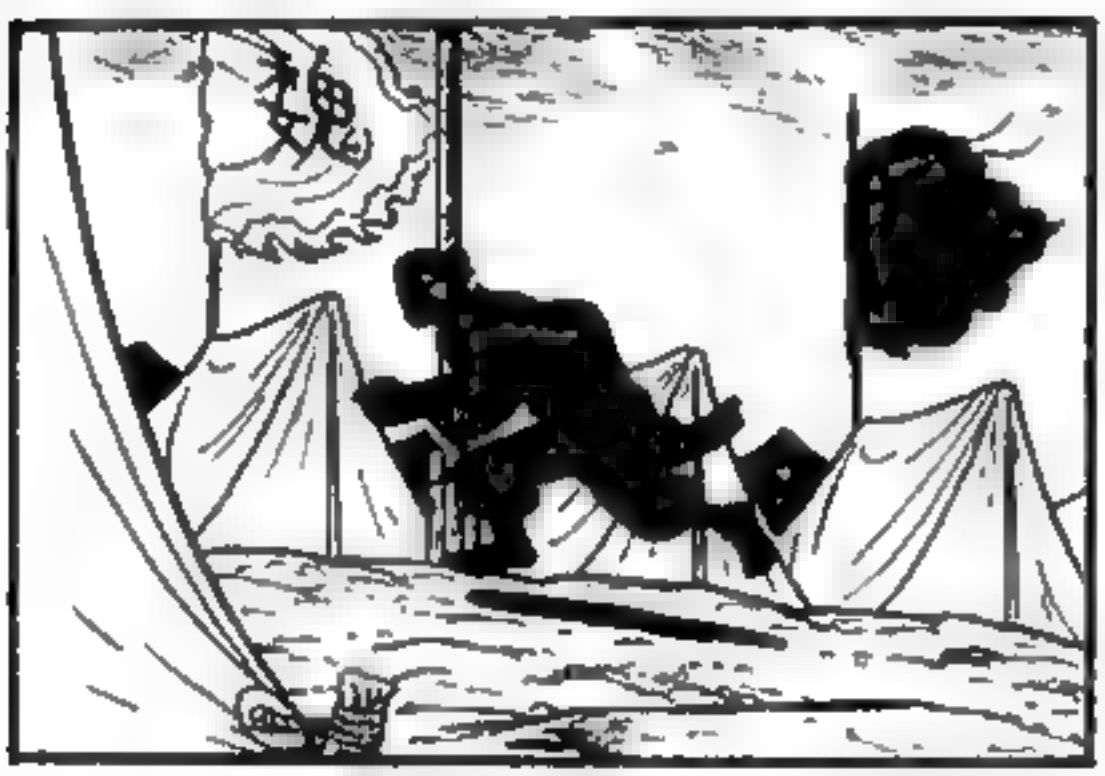
DEFEND THE CAMPS FOR NOW. IS THAT CLEAR?

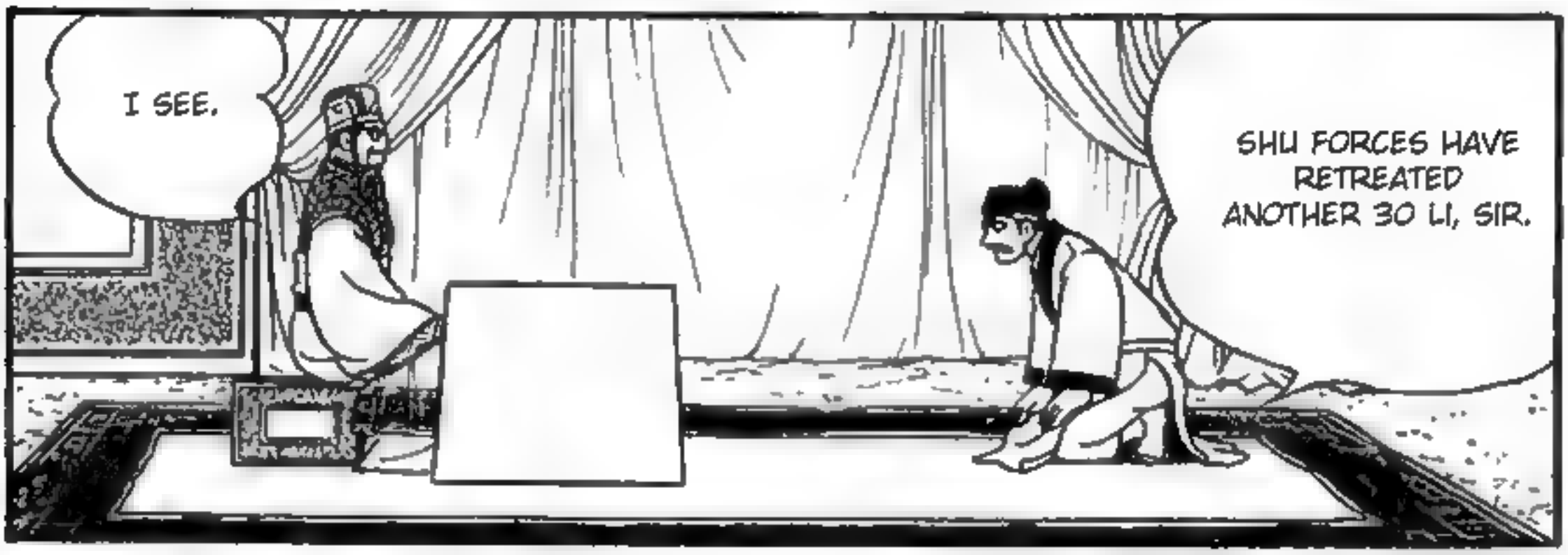
YES, SIR.
AS FOR YOU SCOUTS, KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON THE ENEMY RETREAT.

THUS, INSTEAD OF PURSUING, SIMA YI INCREASED THE NUMBER OF SCOUTS TO SPY ON THE SHU RETREAT.

SETTING UP THE DECISIVE BATTLE



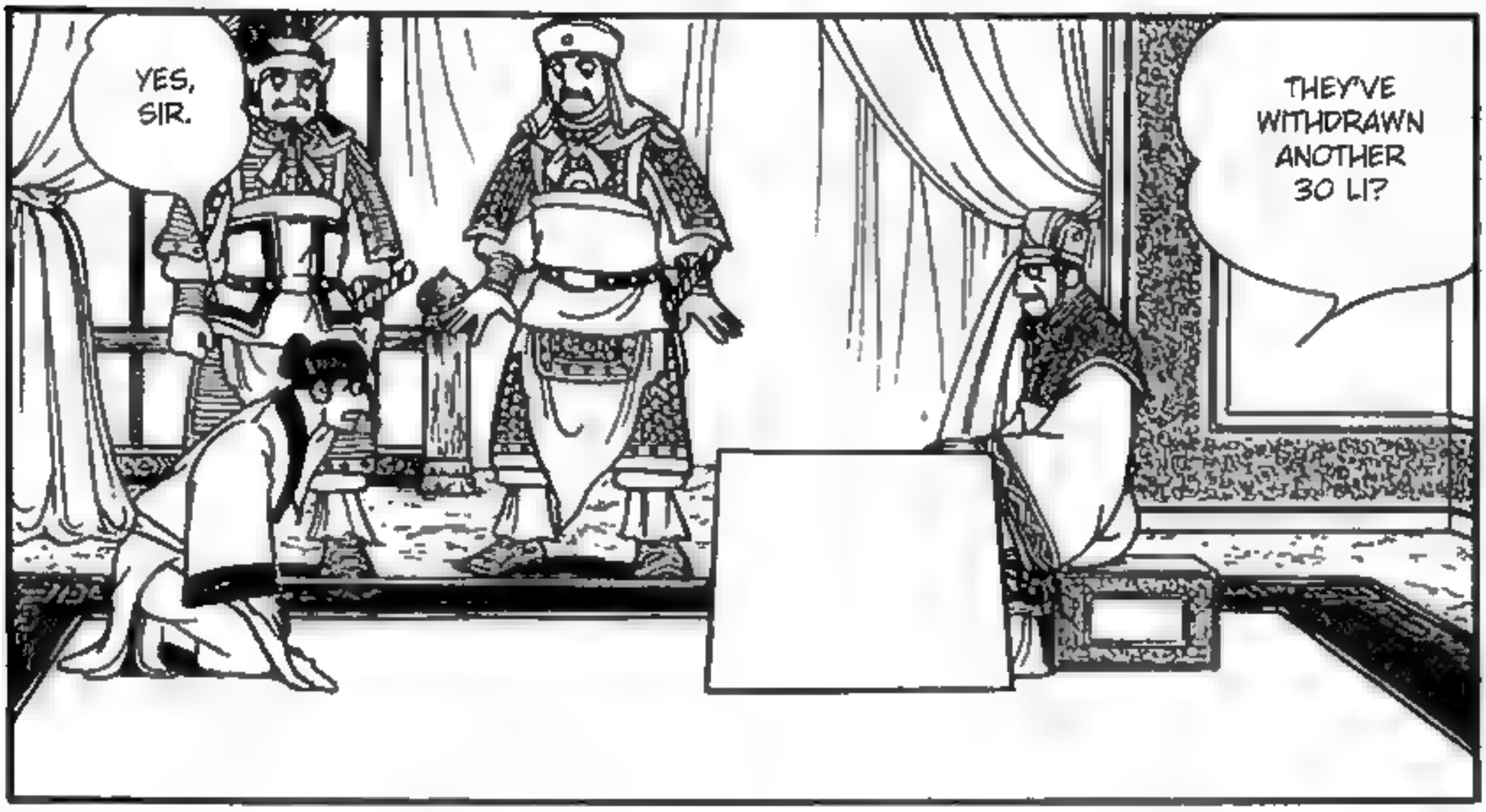




YES, SIR.

CONTINUE KEEPING WATCH.

THE NEXT REPORT CAME AFTER 10 DAYS


YES, SIR.
THEY'VE WITHDRAWN ANOTHER 30 LI?

YES, SIR.

VERY WELL, KEEP WATCHING AS ORDERED.

SEE? THE ENEMIES ARE PAUSING EVERY 30 LI, ALMOST AS IF THEY'RE WAITING FOR US TO PURSUE THEM. WE MUST NOT FALL INTO ZHUGE LIANG'S TRAP.

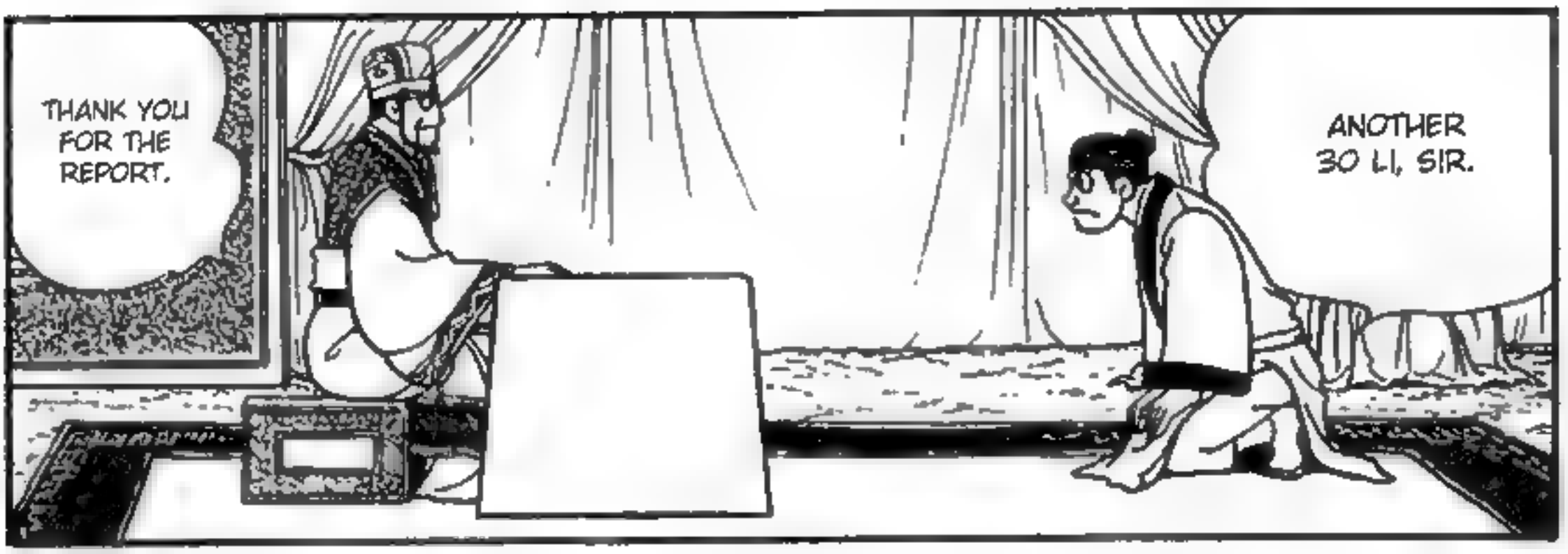
HMM... I THINK THE COMMANDER IS WORRYING A BIT TOO MUCH, HONESTLY.

WHAT DO YOU MEN REALLY THINK ABOUT THIS "FEIGNED RETREAT?"

AT THIS RATE, THE ENEMIES ARE GOING TO GET AWAY TO HANZHONG SCOT FREE!

EXACTLY MY FEELINGS AS WELL.

... 2 DAYS LATER, ANOTHER REPORT ARRIVED


THANK YOU FOR THE REPORT.
ANOTHER 30 LI, SIR.

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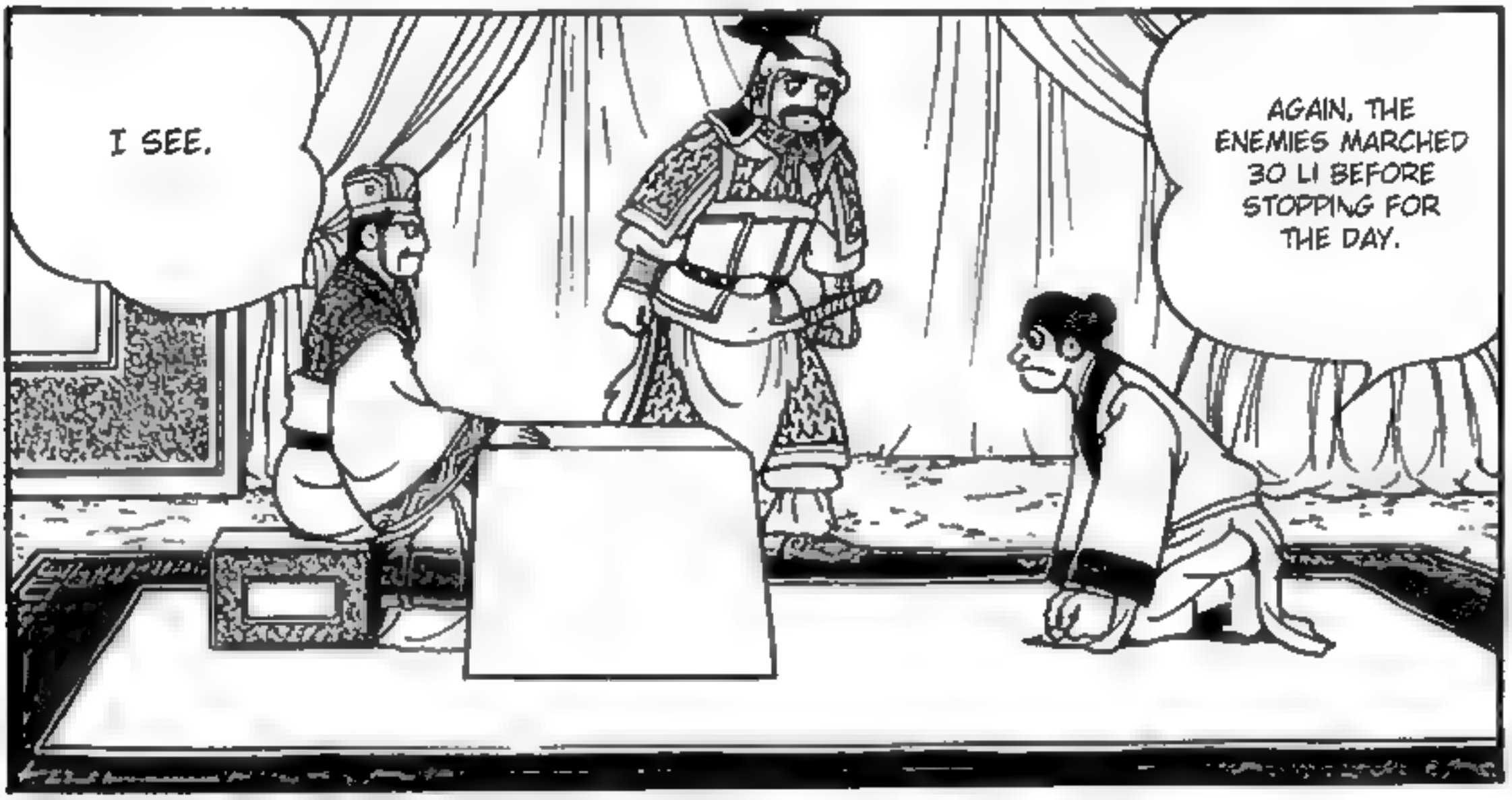
THE NEXT DAY


I SEE.
AGAIN, THE ENEMIES MARCHED 30 LI BEFORE STOPPING FOR THE DAY.

PLEASE, SIR! IF WE SIMPLY LET THEM GO, WE'LL BECOME THE LAUGHING STOCKS OF WEI!

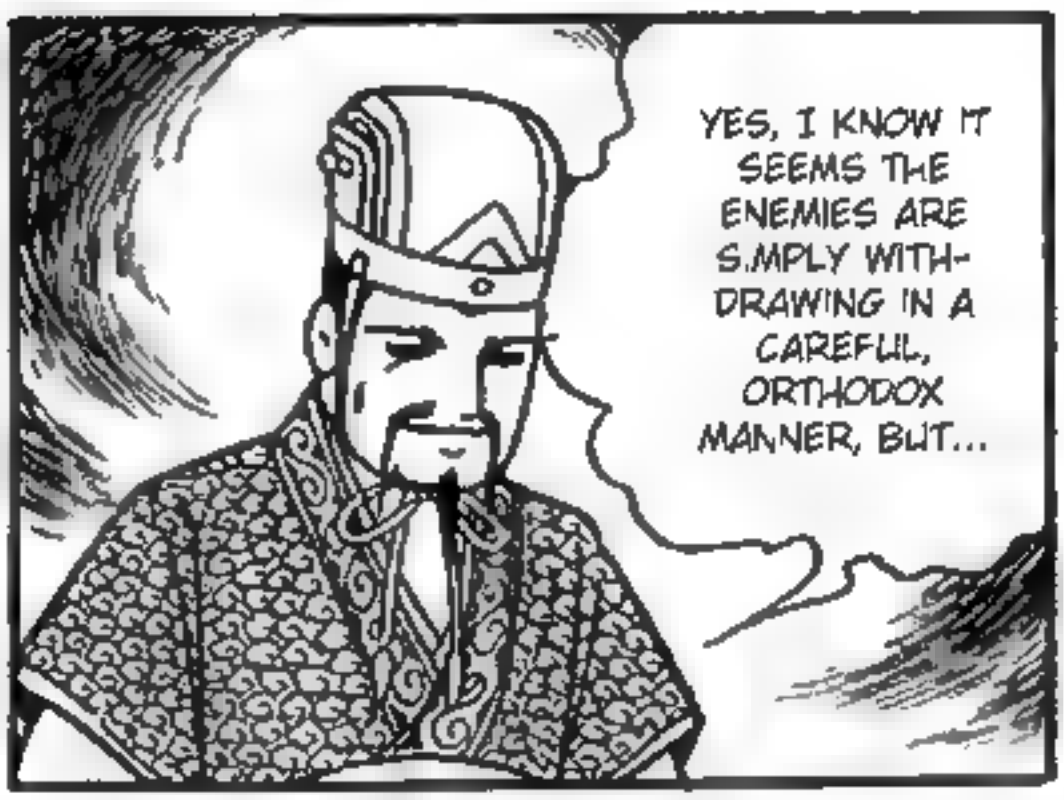
COMMANDER, THE ENEMIES WILL RETREAT TO HANZHONG WITHOUT LOSING A SINGLE MAN AT THIS RATE!

IN MY EYES, I CAN ONLY SEE ZHUGE LIANG EXECUTING A SLOW BUT SAFE RETREAT, STOPPING EVERY 30 LI JUST IN CASE TO DEAL WITH ANY ENEMY PURSUIT. IT IS AN ORTHODOX TACTIC TO USE IN THE FACE OF LARGE ENEMY FORCES!

MNN...

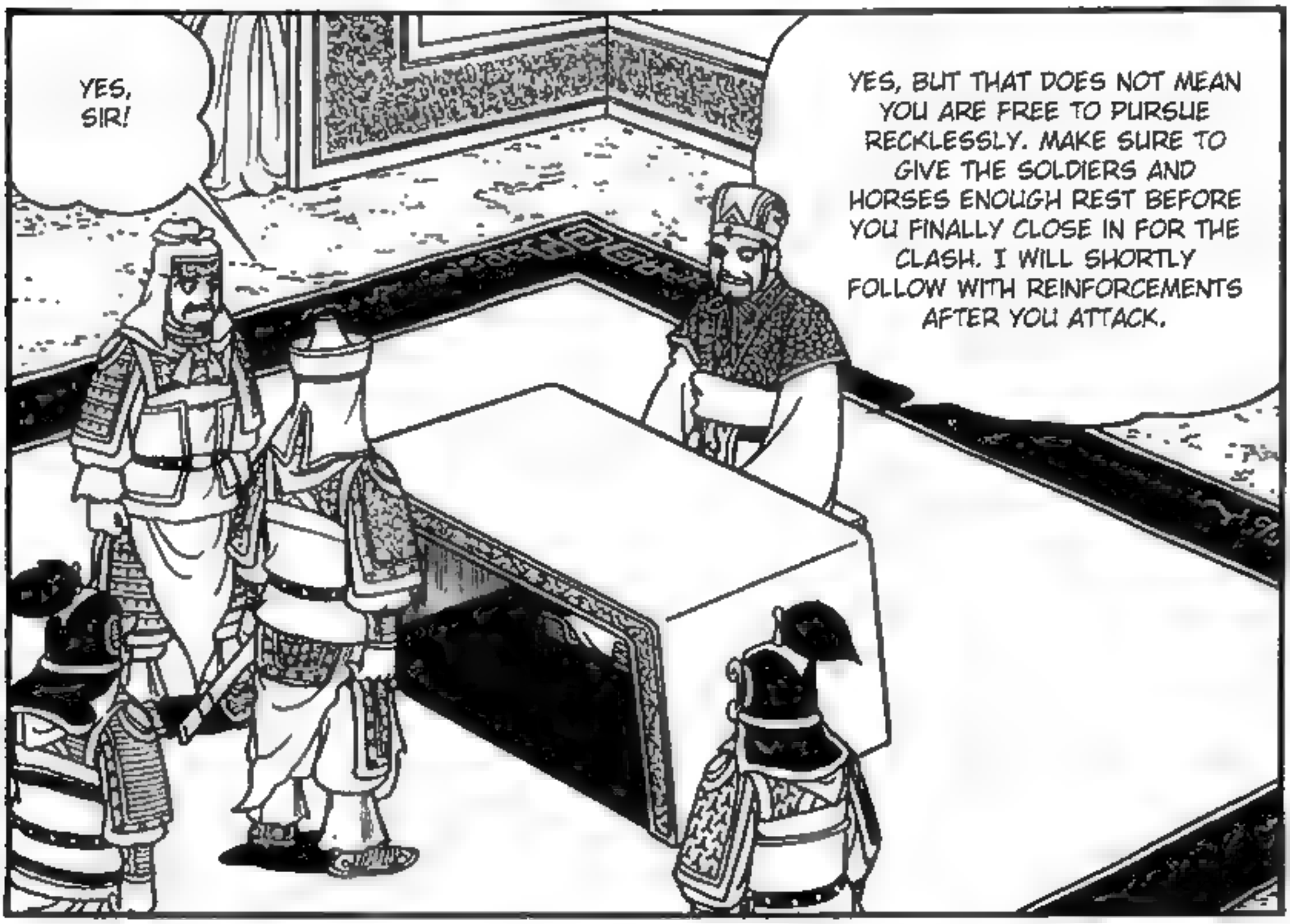
IF YOU CANNOT SHAKE YOUR WORRIES, THEN AT LEAST ALLOW ME TO LEAD A PART OF OUR FORCES TO PURSUE THEM!

COMMANDER! EXCESSIVE WORRYING WILL ONLY CAUSE ONE TO LOSE EVEN WHEN THE ODDS ARE STACKED IN ONE'S FAVOUR!


YES, I KNOW IT SEEMS THE ENEMIES ARE SIMPLY WITH-DRAWING IN A CAREFUL, ORTHODOX MANNER, BUT...

YOU'LL GRANT ME PERMIS-SION!?

VERY WELL. I WILL GRANT YOU ONE CAPABLE ARMY TO PURSUE THEM.


YES, SIR!
YES, BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN YOU ARE FREE TO PURSUE RECKLESSLY. MAKE SURE TO GIVE THE SOLDIERS AND HORSES ENOUGH REST BEFORE YOU FINALLY CLOSE IN FOR THE CLASH. I WILL SHORTLY FOLLOW WITH REINFORCEMENTS AFTER YOU ATTACK.

AN ELITE ARMY OF 30,000 UNDER ZHANG HE'S COMMAND BEGAN A RAPID PURSUIT

AN ADDITIONAL 5000 TROOPS LED BY SIMA YI MARCHED BEHIND TO SERVE AS REINFORCEMENTS. ALL REMAINING WEI TROOPS STAYED BEHIND TO DEFEND THE CAMPS.

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CHANCELLOR! WEI TROOPS HAVE BEGUN THEIR PURSUIT AT LAST! THEY ARE LED BY ZHANG HE WITH 30,000 TROOPS, CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY AN ADDITIONAL 5000 TROOPS LED BY SIMA YI.

GENTLEMEN, THE FATE OF WEI AND SHU MAY HINGE UPON THE UPCOMING BATTLE. I EXPECT EVERY MAN TO FIGHT WITH THE VIGOUR AND RESOLVE OF 10 MEN.

SO SIMA YI TOOK THE BAIT AT LAST, DID HE?

NOW I NEED AN OFFICER TO GO AROUND TO THREATEN ZHANG HE'S REAR. THIS IS A HIGHLY DANGEROUS BUT CRITICAL MISSION AS HE WILL, IN TURN, HAVE TO DEAL WITH BEING REAR ATTACKED BY SIMA YI'S REINFORCEMENTS.

AND WHAT IF YOU WERE TO FAIL, WANG PING?

I WILL GO, CHANCELLOR.

YOUR RESOLVE IS COMMEND-ABLE.

I THINK NOT OF FAILURE, BUT ONLY TO DO MY DUTY AND GIVE MY LIFE IF NEEDED TO HELP WIN THE BATTLE UPON WHICH THE FATE OF SHU HINGES.

SPLENDID. I WILL SEE TO IT THAT ONE MORE DIVISION ASSISTS YOU.

WITH NO HESITATION, SIR.

YOU ARE AWARE THAT I AM ESSENTIALLY ORDERING YOU TO CHARGE INTO DEATH ITSELF, AS YOU WILL BE SURROUNDED BY THE FORCES OF ZHANG HE AND SIMA YI, YES? WILL YOU STILL GO IN SPITE OF THIS?

ALLOW ME TO LEAD THAT SECOND DIVISION, CHANCELLOR!

WHAT DOES IT MATTER IF ZHANG HE CAN SLAY ME!? I AM ALREADY PREPARED TO CHARGE INTO HELL ITSELF BY VOLUNTEERING FOR THIS MISSION!

ZHANG YI? I'M AFRAID YOU WILL BE NO MATCH FOR ZHANG HE.

THANK YOU, SIR.

EXCELLENT RESOLVE. ONLY OFFICERS WHO'VE ABANDONED HOPES OF RETURNING ALIVE ARE FIT TO ACCEPT THIS MISSION. YOU HAVE THE COMMAND OF THE SECOND DIVISION, ZHANG YI.

TOMORROW, LET ZHANG HE'S ARMY PASS YOU. ONCE WE'VE ENGAGED THEM FROM THE FRONT, YOU ARE TO ATTACK HIS REAR BEFORE SIMA YI ARRIVES. WHEN SIMA YI DOES ARRIVE AT LAST, ZHANG YI'S DIVISION WILL HOLD THEM BACK WHILE WANG PING'S DIVISION WILL CONTINUE TO ATTACK ZHANG HE'S REAR. I HAVE PLANS FOR THE POSSIBLE SCENARIOS THAT WILL UNFOLD LATER, SO DO NOT CONCERN YOURSELVES WITH THAT. SIMPLY KEEP FIGHTING UNTIL THE LAST MAN.

YES, SIR.

TAKE A FORCE OF 10,000 TROOPS EACH AND HEAD BACK ALONG THE ROAD TONIGHT AND HIDE AT A SUITABLE POSITION IN THE HILLS.

MAY THE HEAVENS BE WITH YOU.

WE BID THE CHANCELLOR FAREWELL.

YES?

YES?

JIANG WEI. LIAO HUA.

YES, SIR.

FOLLOW WANG PING AND ZHANG YI AND ALSO KEEP YOURSELVES HIDDEN ON A NEARBY HILL. YOUR DUTY IS TO STAY HIDDEN AND OBSERVE THEIR SITUATION.

YES, SIR.

WHEN YOU SENSE THAT THE BATTLE HAS REACHED ITS CLIMAX AND WANG PING AND ZHANG YI ARE IN GREAT DANGER, READ THE CONTENTS IN THIS POUCH AND DO AS WRITTEN.

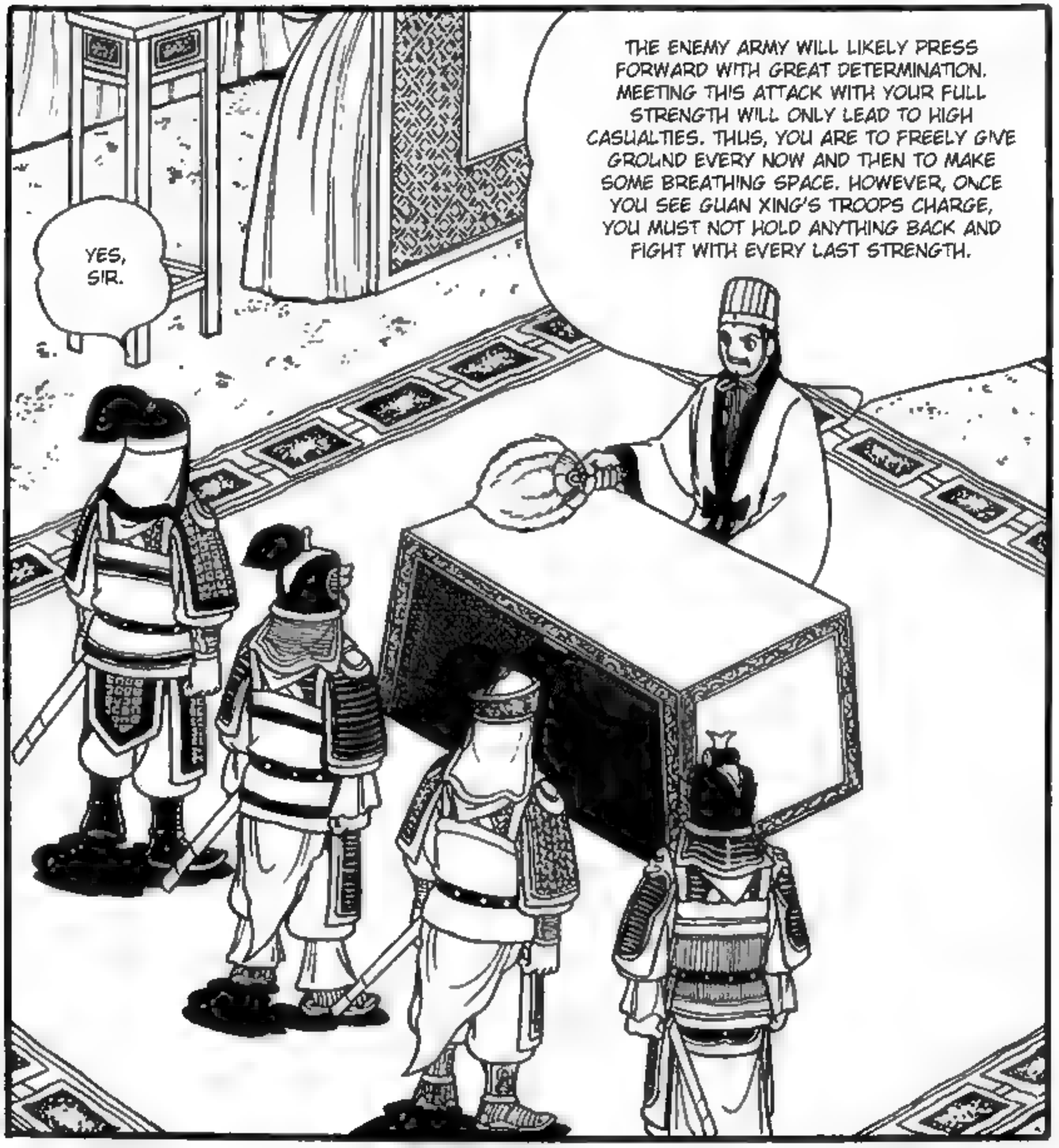
YES?

YES?

WU BAN, WU YI, MA ZHONG, AND ZHANG NI!

YOU FOUR WILL LEAD THE ATTACK ON ZHANG HE'S FORCES FROM THE FRONT.

YES?
YES?


YES, SIR.
THE ENEMY ARMY WILL LIKELY PRESS FORWARD WITH GREAT DETERMINATION. MEETING THIS ATTACK WITH YOUR FULL STRENGTH WILL ONLY LEAD TO HIGH CASUALTIES. THUS, YOU ARE TO FREELY GIVE GROUND EVERY NOW AND THEN TO MAKE SOME BREATHING SPACE. HOWEVER, ONCE YOU SEE GUAN XING'S TROOPS CHARGE, YOU MUST NOT HOLD ANYTHING BACK AND FIGHT WITH EVERY LAST STRENGTH.

YES?

GUAN XING.

YES, SIR.

HIDE YOUR TROOPS AT A NEARBY HILL. ONCE I GIVE YOU THE SIGNAL BY WAVING A RED FLAG, YOU ARE TO CHARGE INTO THE ENEMY'S FLANK.

THAT NIGHT, EACH OF THE OFFICERS POSITIONED THEMSELVES FOR THE BATTLE TOMORROW.

EVERY OFFICER
KNEW THE FATE
OF SHU NOW
RESTED UPON
THEIR SHOULDERS.

DECISIVE CLASH

YES, AT LAST, IT'S TIME FOR OUR SIDE TO DELIVER A STINGING BLOW.

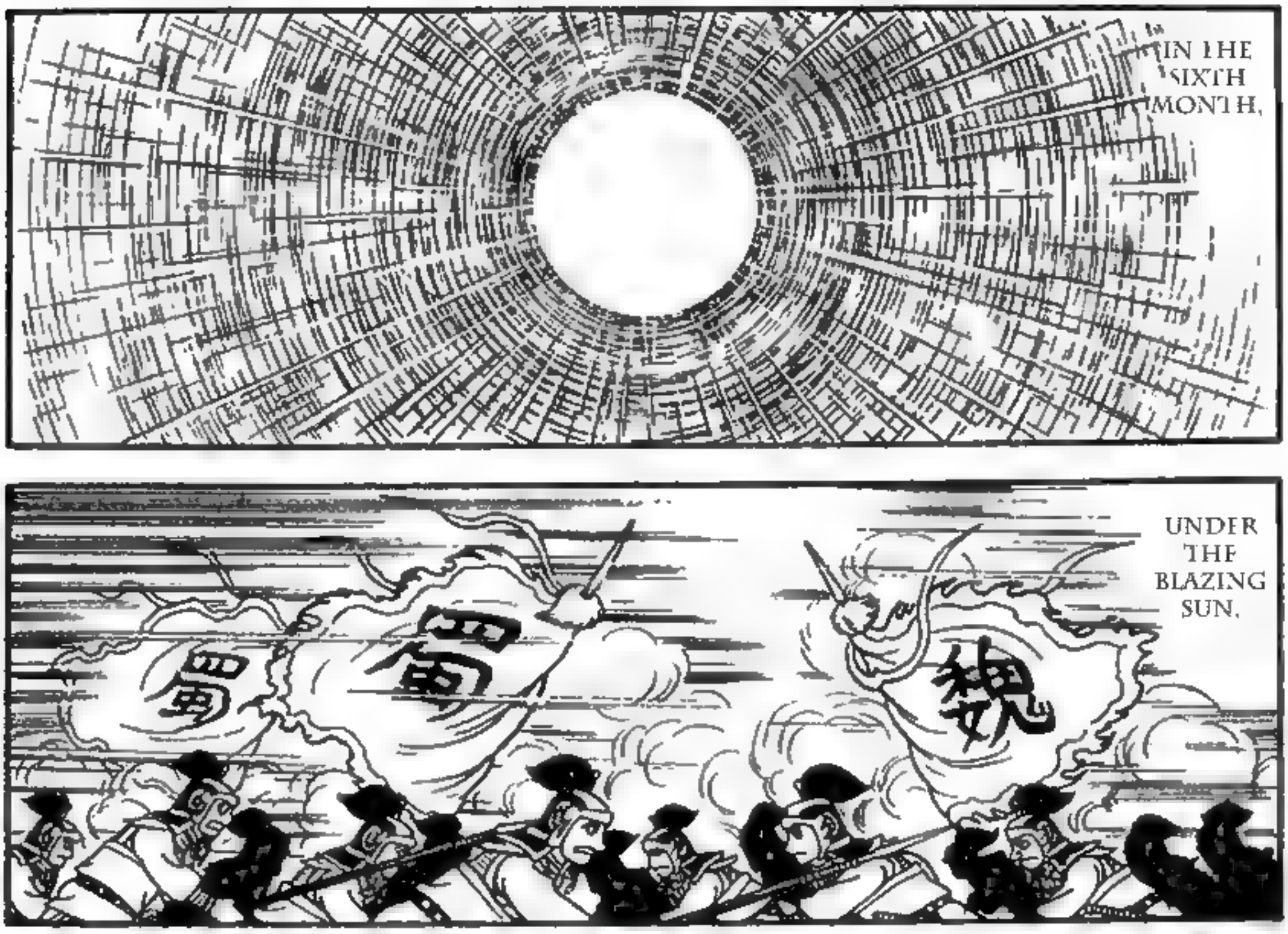
張郃
WE'VE CAUGHT UP WITH THEM AT LAST, GENERAL.

CHARGE!

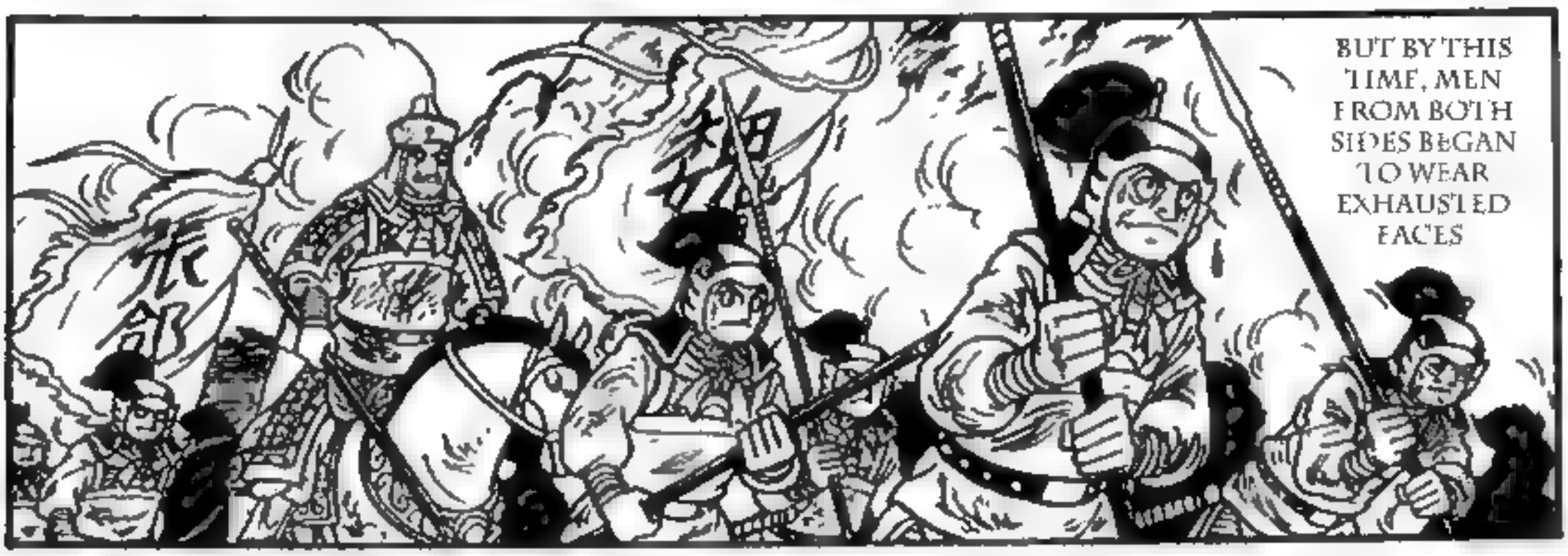
ATTACK!

HERE THEY COME!

THE TWO ARMIES CLASHED ON THE FIELD AT LONG LAST


IN THE
SIXTH
MONTH,
UNDER
THE
BLAZING
SUN,
MASSES OF
TROOPS WERE
LOCKED IN A
KILLING FRENZY
THE MEN AND
HORSES WERE
SOAKED WITH
SWEAT, THE
GROUND WAS
STAINED WITH
BLOOD.

THE ELITE WEI SOLDIERS LIVED UP TO THEIR REPUTATIONS, DRIVING THE SHU LINES BACK 30 LI BY NOON


BUT BY THIS TIME, MEN FROM BOTH SIDES BEGAN TO WEAR EXHAUSTED FACES

IT WAS AT THIS MOMENT A RED FLAG WAVED ATOP A NEARBY HILL.

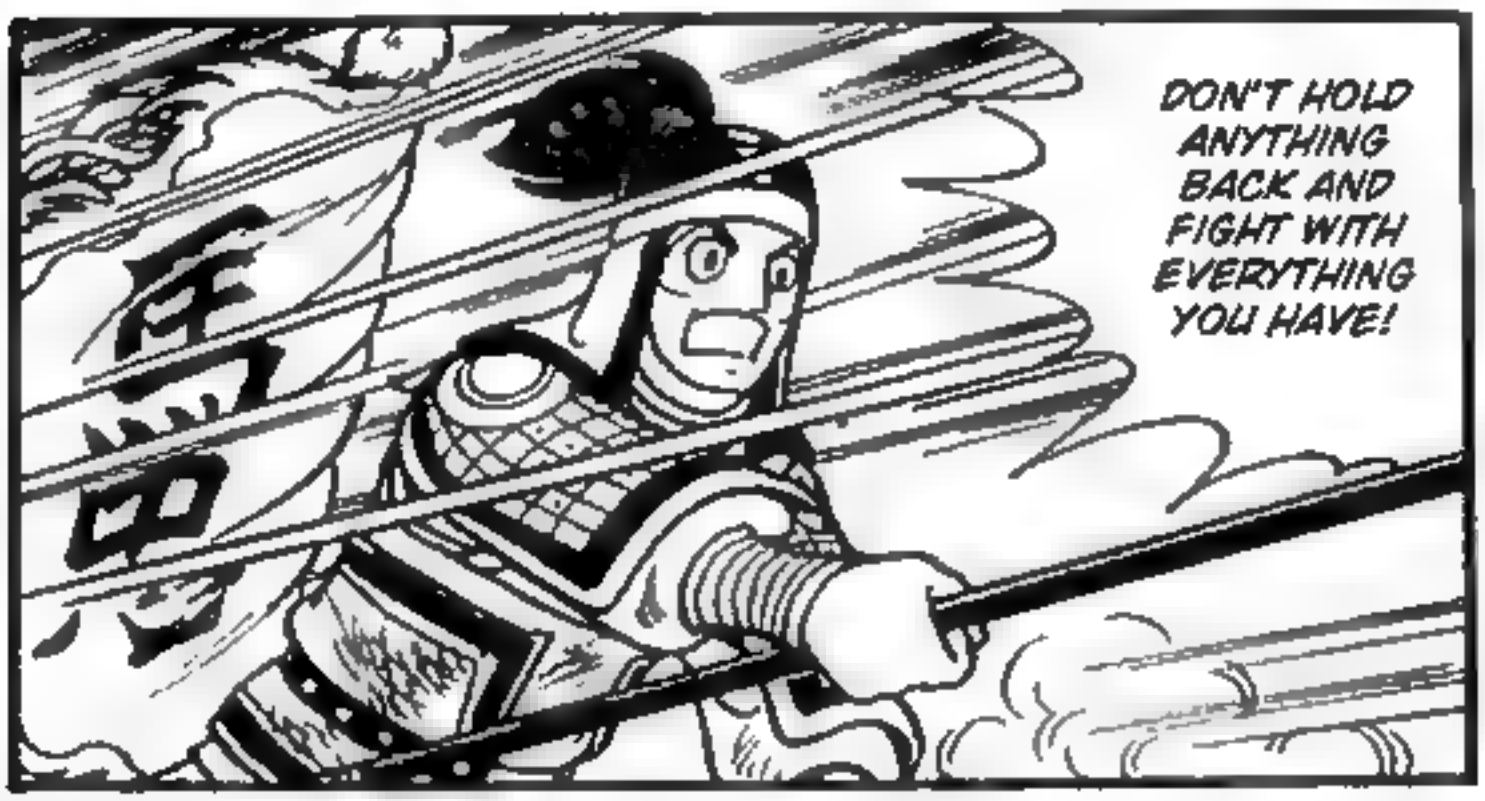
IT'S ABOUT TIME!

GENERAL! IT'S THE SIGNAL!

LET'S DRIVE A WEDGE INTO THEIR FLANK!

HIDDEN ENEMIES!

HM!?


DON'T HOLD ANYTHING BACK AND FIGHT WITH EVERYTHING YOU HAVE!

GUAN XING'S TROOPS HAVE CHARGED IN!

AS GUAN XING'S TROOPS ATTACKED ZHANG HE'S FLANK,

THE TROOPS OF WU BAN, WU YI, MA ZHONG, AND ZHANG NI ALL COUNTERATTACKED WITH FULL FORCE

THE FRENZIED KILLING RAMPED UP TO EVEN GREATER LEVELS

AT THE RENEWED VIGOUR OF THE COORDI NATED SHU ATTACK

MANY WEI TROOPS BEGAN TO FALL.

ADDED TO THIS WERE THE TROOPS OF WANG PING AND ZHANG YI CHARGING INTO THE WEI REAR

IT'S JUST AS OUR COMMANDER FEARED...

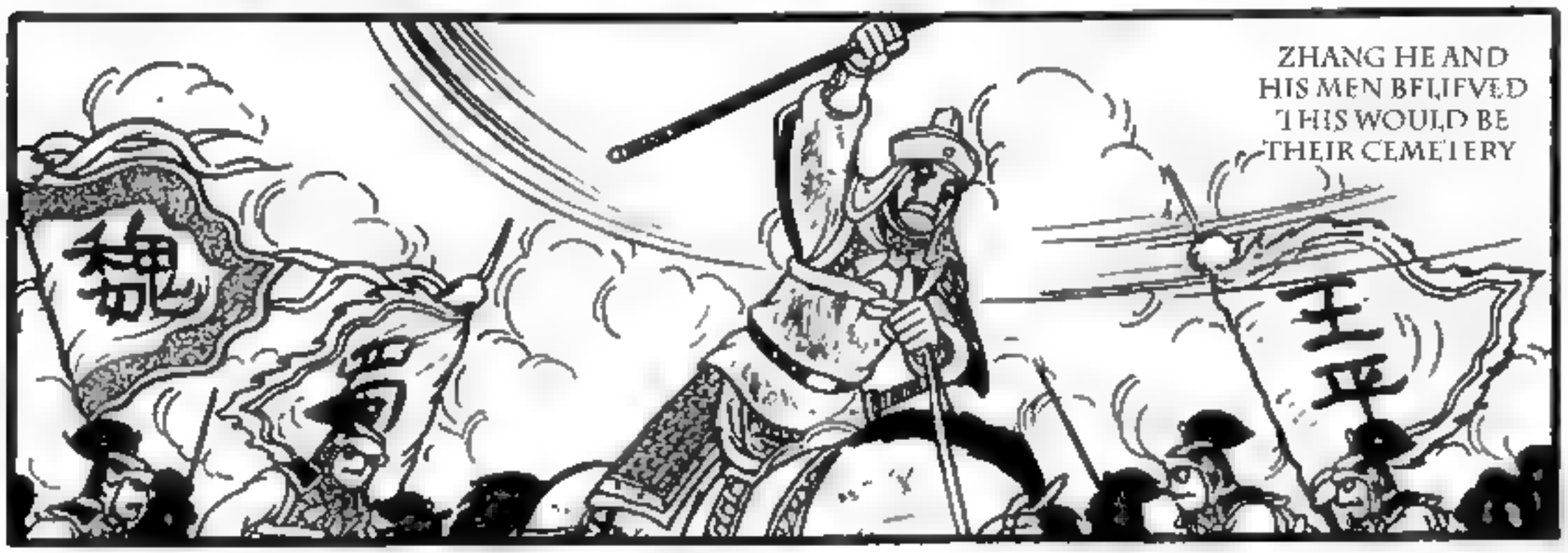
YES, OUR ARMY IS SURROUNDED BY SHU TROOPS ON ALL SIDES, SIR!

MORE HIDDEN SHU TROOPS HAVE REVEALED THEMSELVES AND ARE NOW ATTACKING OUR REAR!?

DO NOT WAVER, MEN! OUR PRIORITIES REMAIN THE SAME AS EVER! TO FIGHT BRAVELY FOR THE EMPIRE!
THESE SHU TROOPS WILL HAVE TO FIGHT THROUGH HELL ITSELF IF THEY WISH TO SLAY ZHANG HE!

ヒ〃ュ 〃〃

DESPITE THE DISCIPLINED COURAGE OF THE WEI ARMY, THE THREE-PRONGED ATTACK BEGAN TO TURN THE TIDES OF BATTLE IN SHU'S FAVOUR


ZHANG HE AND HIS MEN BELIEVED THIS WOULD BE THEIR CEMETERY

BUT JUST THEN, SIMA YI ARRIVED WITH REINFORCE-MENTS

STILL, THE BATTLE IS PRO-GRESSING JUST AS THE CHANCELLOR PREDICTED. THERE MAY BE HOPE YET, SO LET US CARRY OUT OUR ORDERS UNTIL THE VERY END!

NOW IT'S OUR TURN TO BE SURROUNDED AND FACE ANNHILATION...

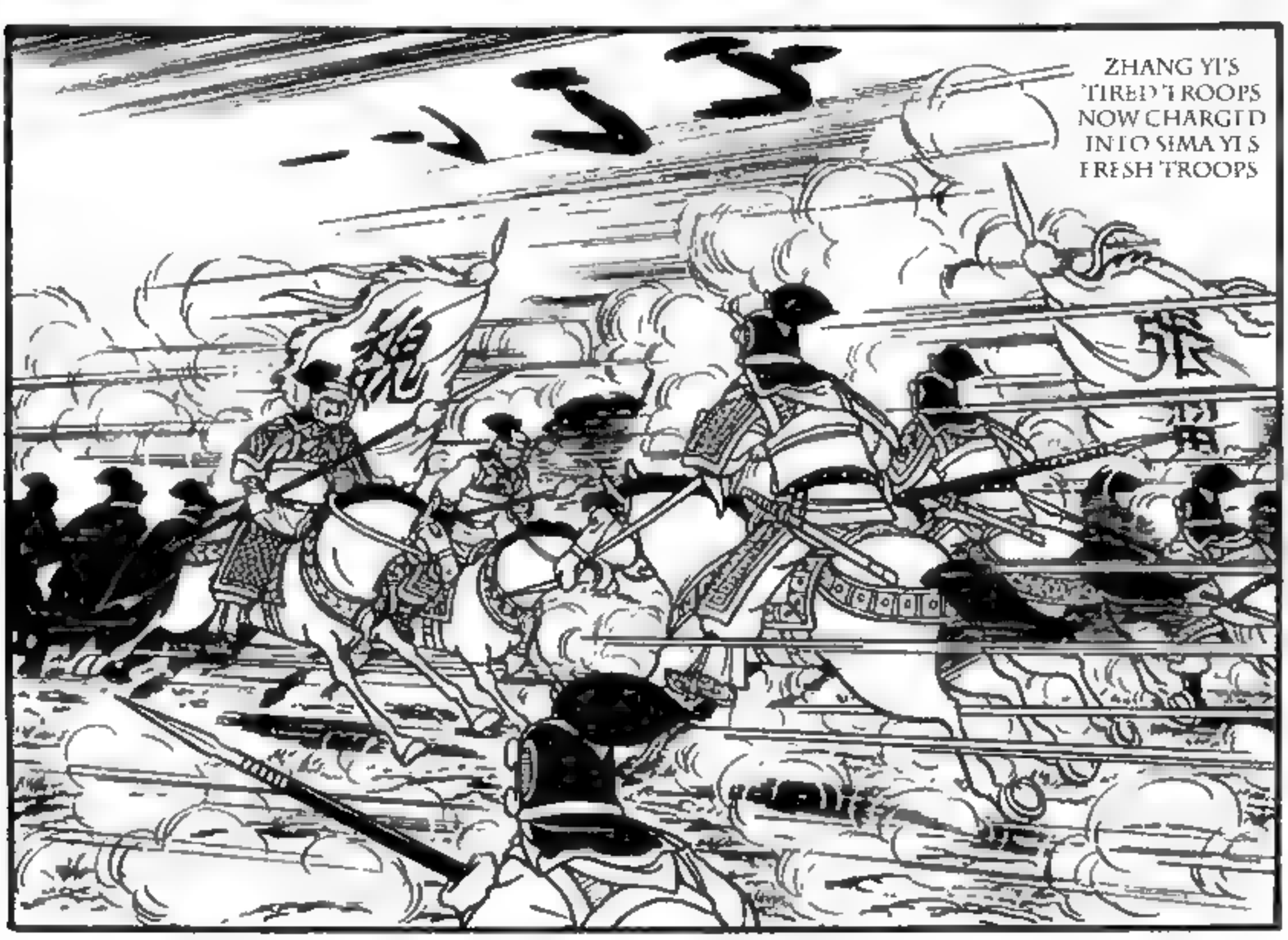
WANG PING! SIMA YI IS HERE!

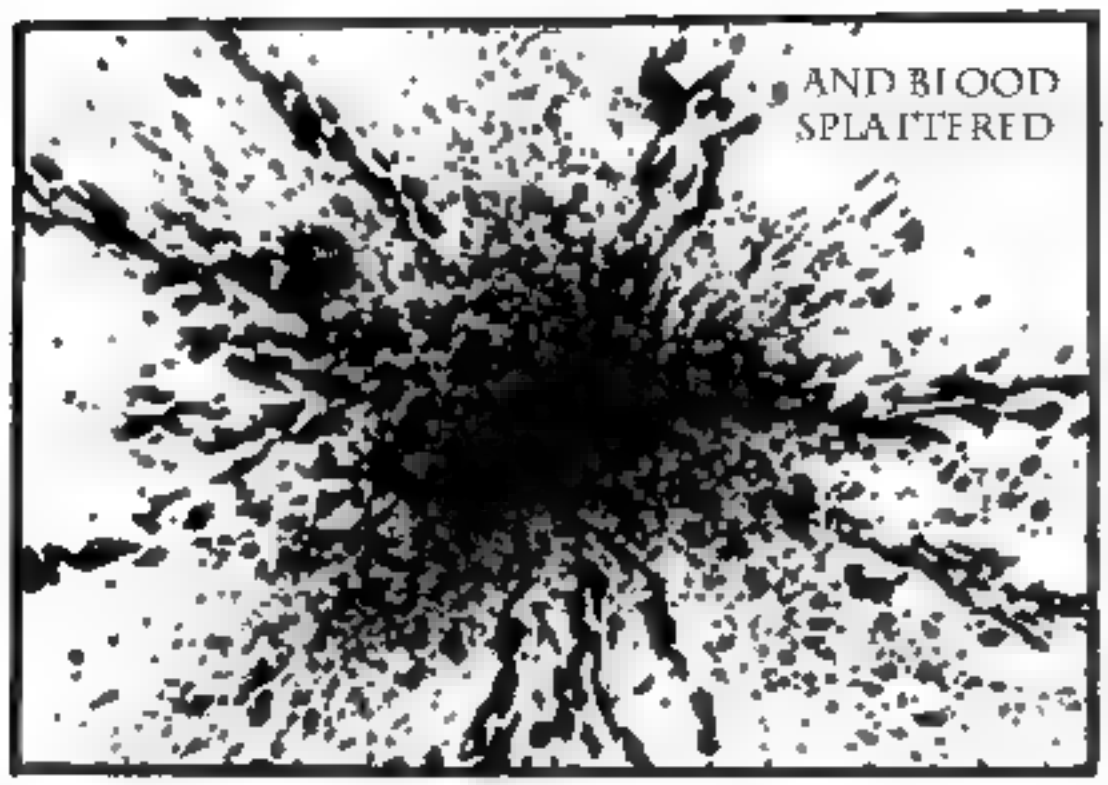
YES, AND I WILL TURN MY TROOPS AROUND TO MEET SIMA YI'S TROOPS.

王平

THEN I WILL KEEP ATTACK-ING ZHANG HE'S ARMY.

COME, MEN! DO NOT FEAR A GOOD DEATH!


ZHANG YI'S TIRED TROOPS NOW CHARGED INTO SIMA YI'S FRESH TROOPS


AND BLOOD
SPLATTERED

HEADS
FLEW.

AS THE
BATTLE
TURNED
EVEN MORE
CHAOTIC
AND
INTENSE

CORPSES PILED
UP ALL OVER
THE BATTLE-
FIELD

NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO READ THE CONTENTS OF THE POUCH THAT THE CHANCELLOR GAVE US.

INDEED.

IT SEEMS THE BATTLE HAS REACHED ITS CLIMAX, JIANG WEI.

YES.

"ABANDON YOUR POSITIONS AND RUSH BEHIND SIMA YI'S REAR TO ATTACK HIS FORTIFIED CAMPS ALONG THE WEI RIVER."

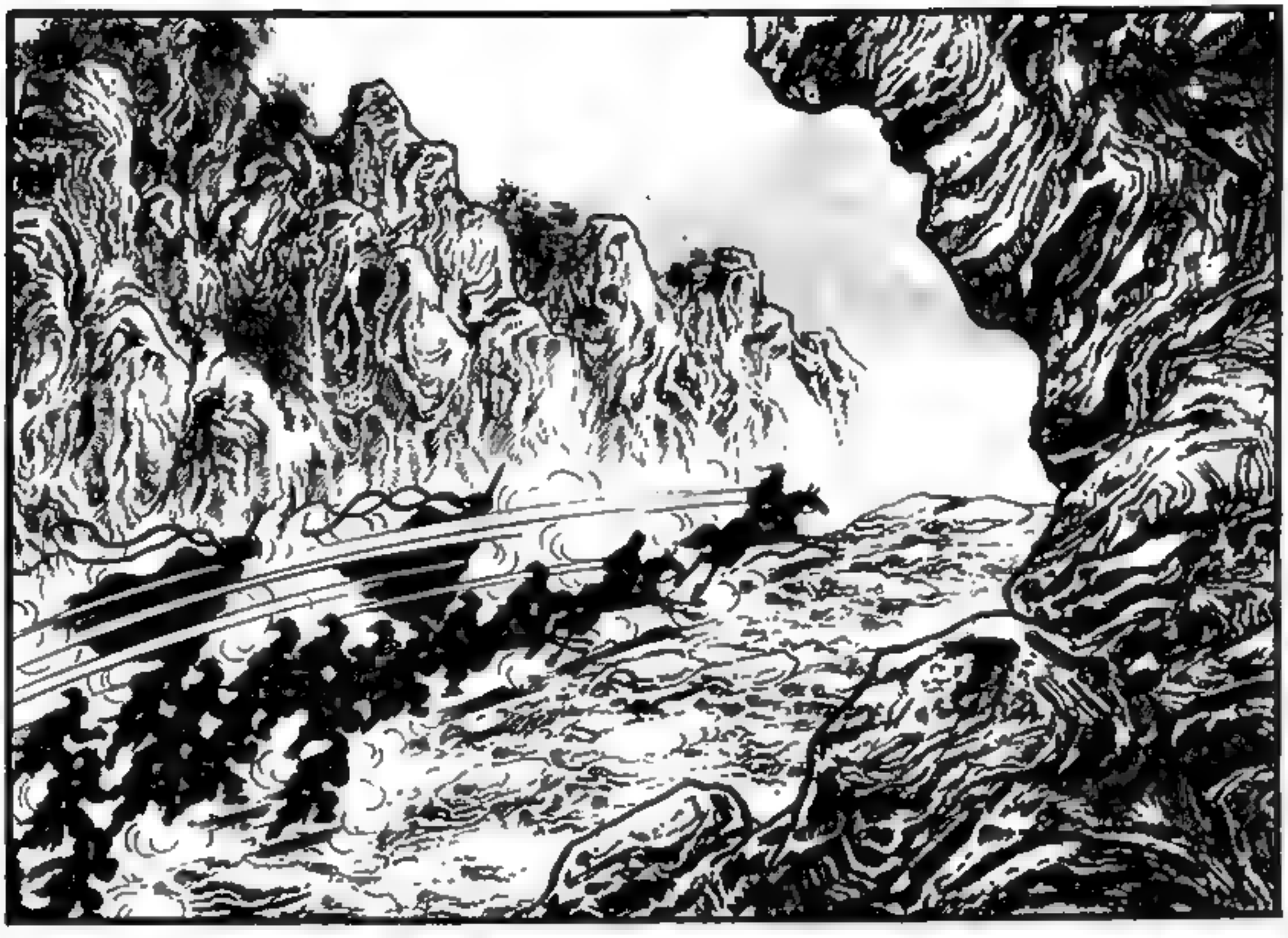
WHAT DOES IT SAY?

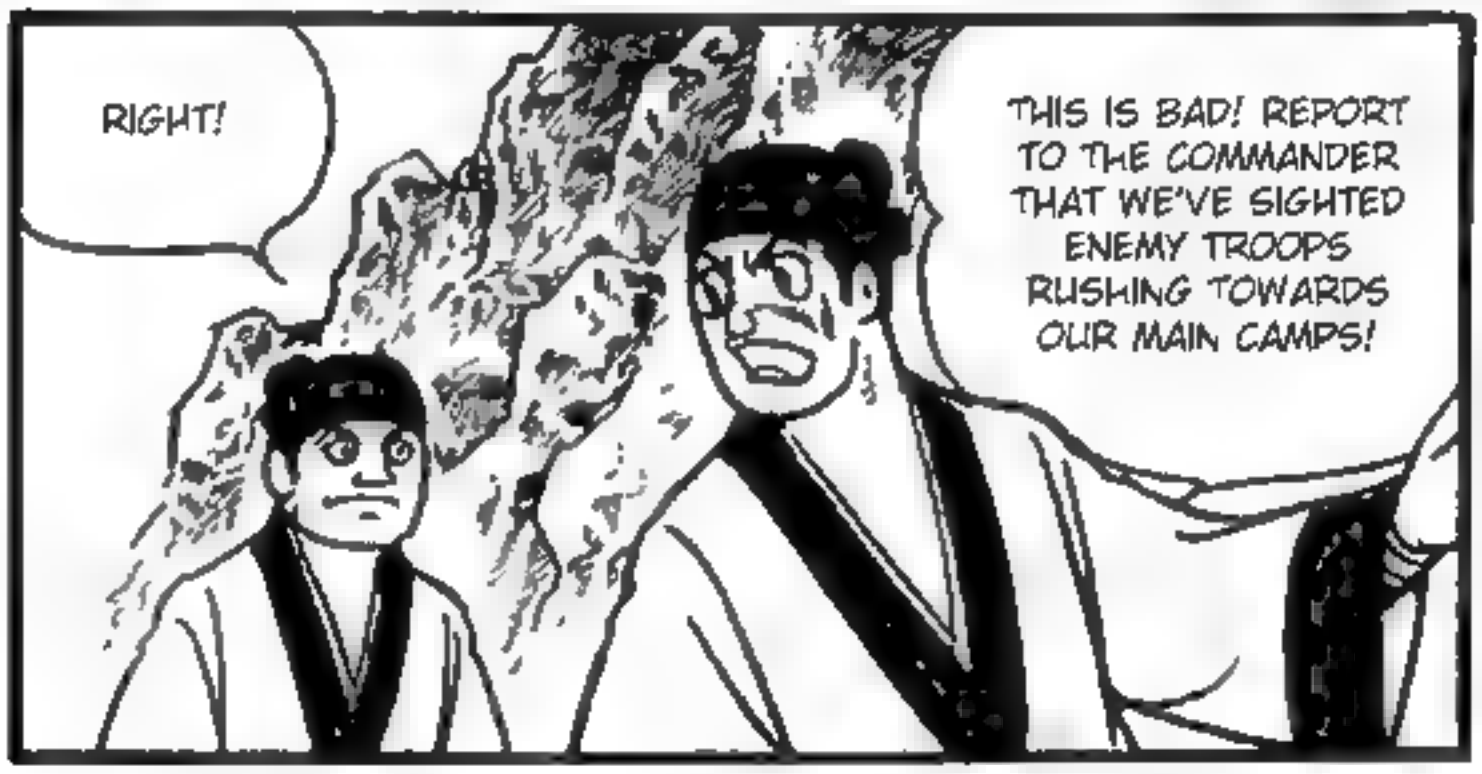
IF WE CAN CAPTURE THEIR CAMPS, THEY WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO SIT STILL AND PLAY DEFENSE IN QISHAN. THE ROAD TO CHANG'AN WILL OPEN ONCE MORE!

FORGET ABOUT THE BATTLE HERE AND ATTACK THE CAMPS!?

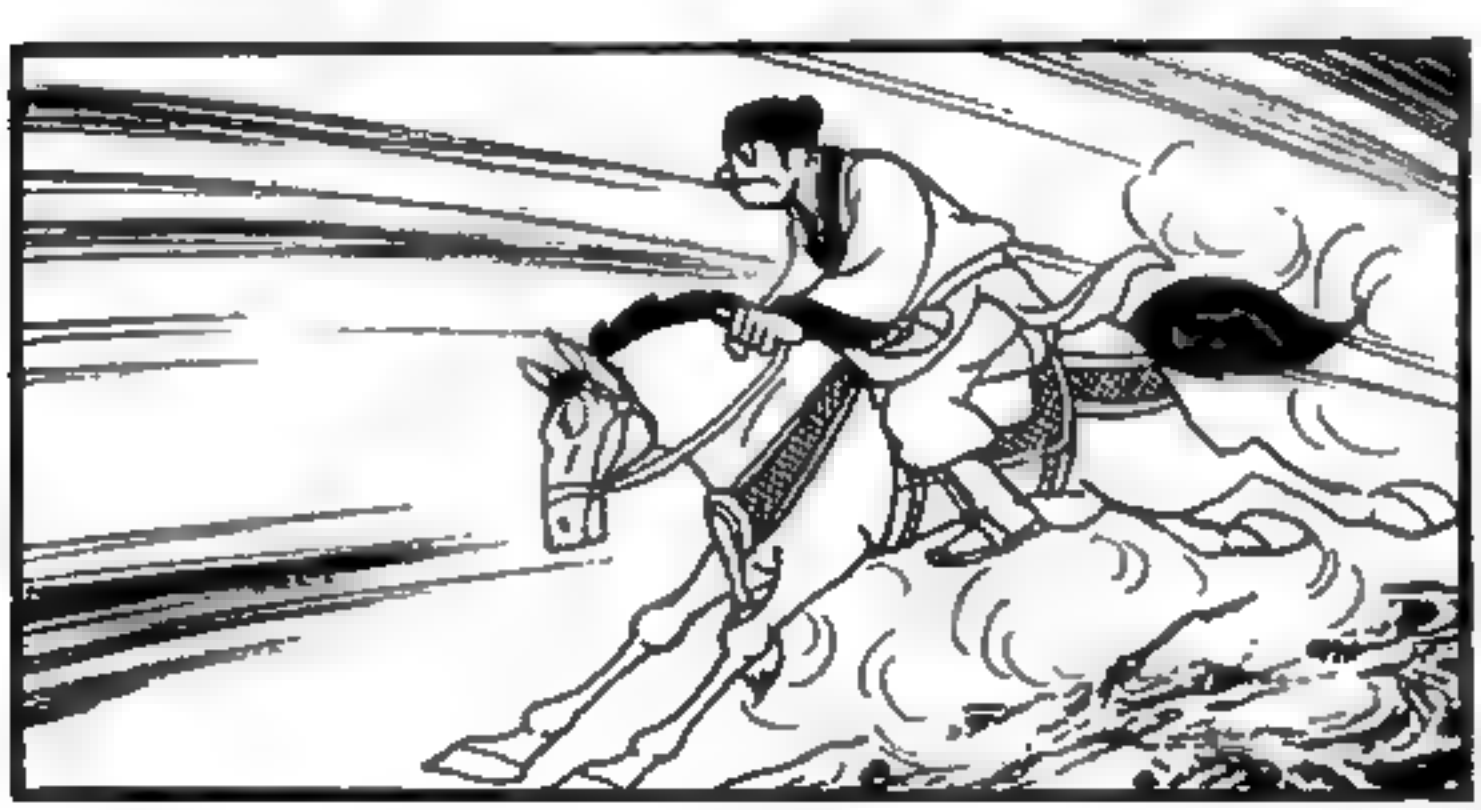
HEAD FOR THE ENEMY CAMPS! VICTORY LIES THERE!

SO THAT'S WHAT THE CHANCELLOR WAS AIMING FOR ALL ALONG!

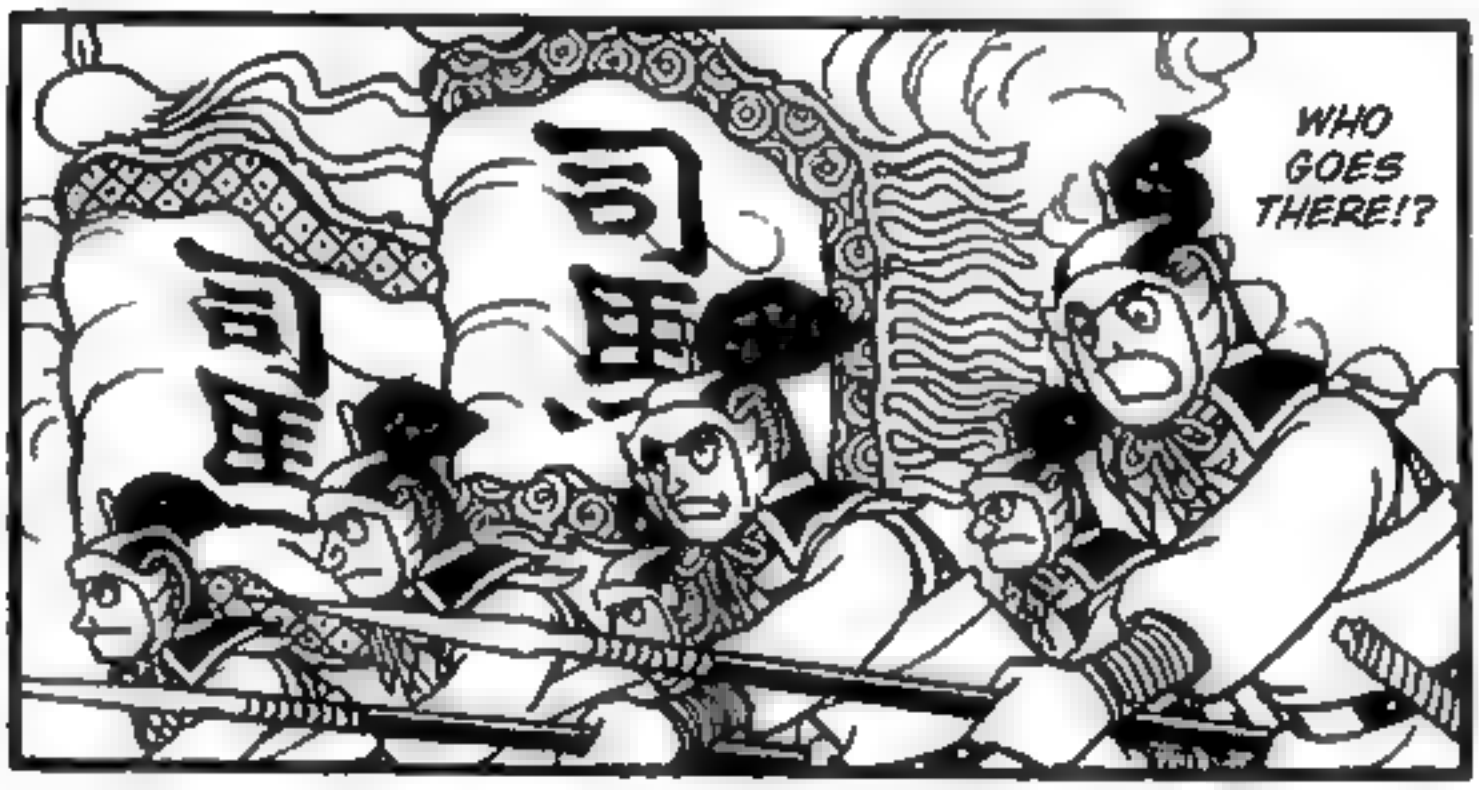



RIGHT!
THIS IS BAD! REPORT TO THE COMMANDER THAT WE'VE SIGHTED ENEMY TROOPS RUSHING TOWARDS OUR MAIN CAMPS!

WHAT? THE ENEMIES HAD MORE TROOPS HIDDEN ABOUT!?



EMERGENCY REPORT!

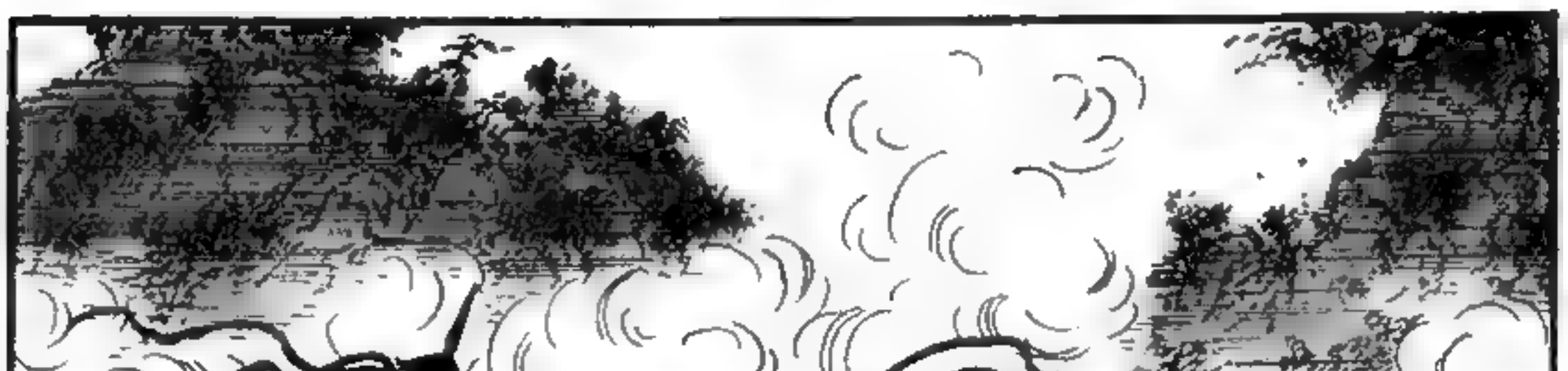

WHO GOES THERE!?

COMMANDER SIMA YI!?

I AM A SCOUT, HERE TO DELIVER A MESSAGE OF UTMOST IMPOR-TANCE TO THE COMMANDER!

THANK YOU!

HE'S OVER THERE!



COMMANDER!

AHH! OUR CAMPS! TAKING THEM WAS ZHUGE LIANG'S OBJECTIVE FROM THE START!

WHAT!?

SHU FORCES STILL HAD HIDDEN TROOPS NEARBY! WE JUST SPOTTED THEM RUSHING BEHIND US IN THE DIRECTION OF OUR CAMPS! JUDGING BY THEIR FLAGS, THEY WERE LED BY SHU GENERALS JIANG WEI AND LIAO HUA!

司馬

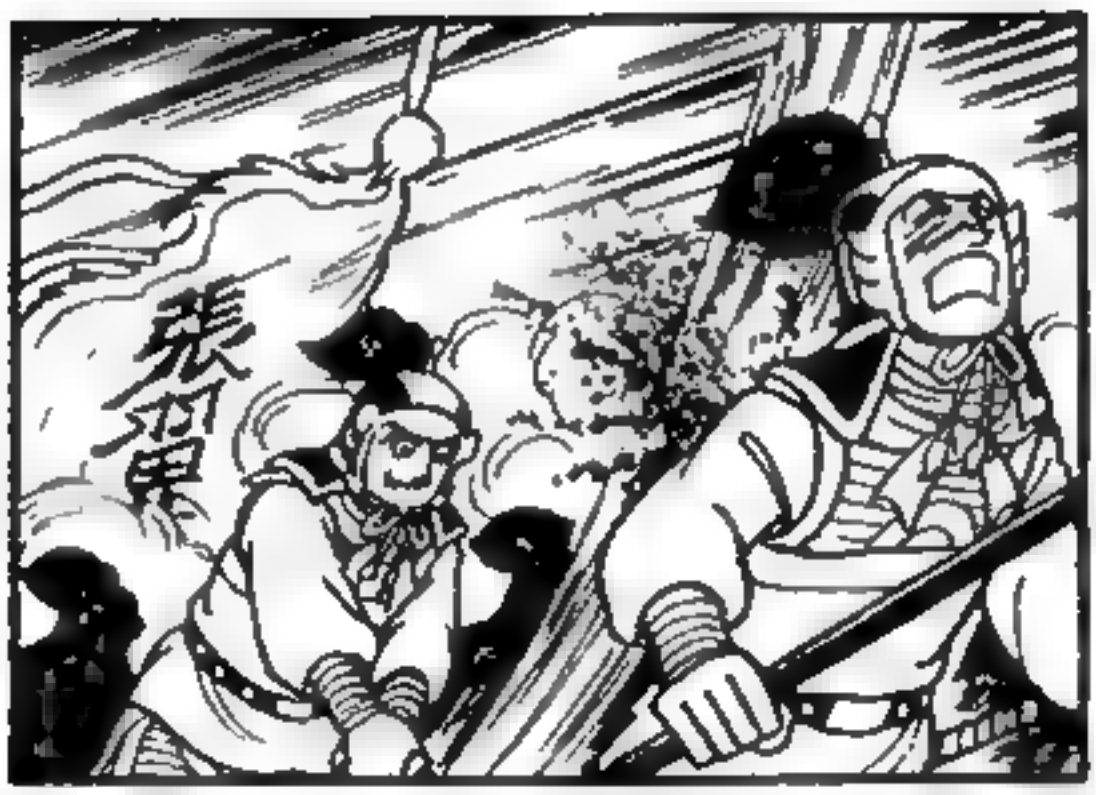
WE CANNOT HOPE TO BLOCK OFF THEIR ADVANCE TO CHANG'AN IF OUR CAMPS AT KEY DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ARE CAPTURED! RETREAT! RETREAT! ALL UNITS RETREAT!

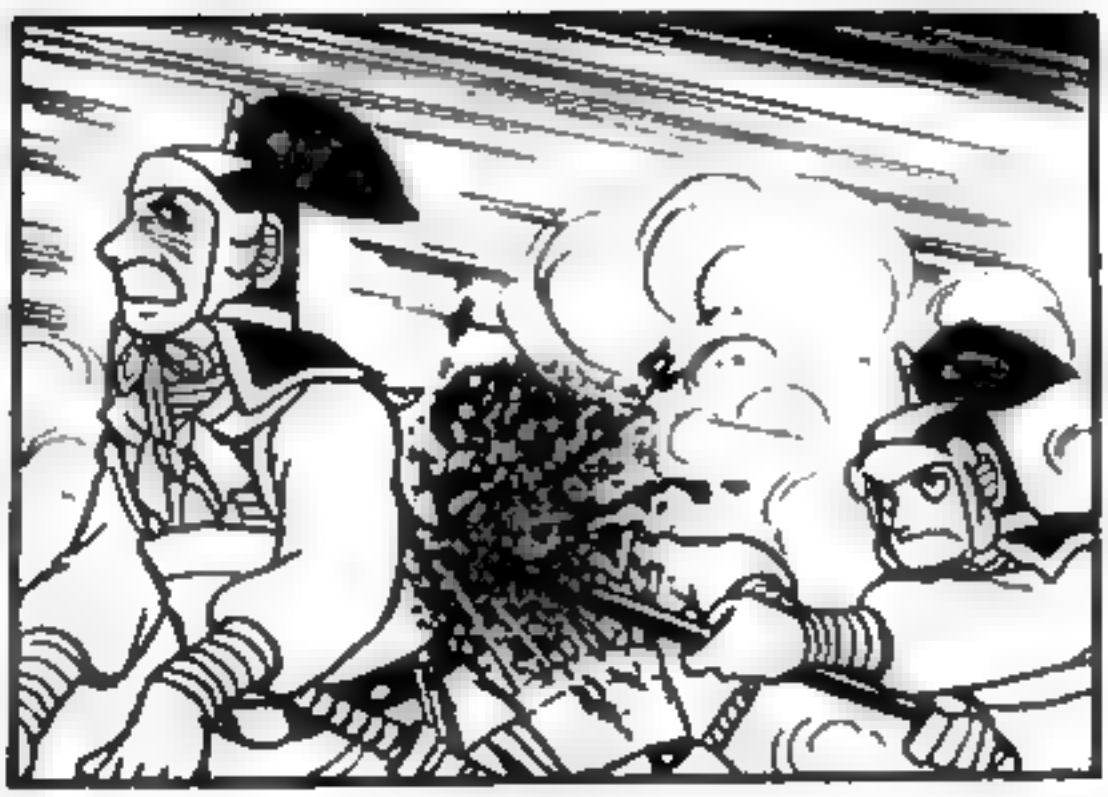
IT'S THE SIGNAL TO WITHDRAW!

RETREAT!

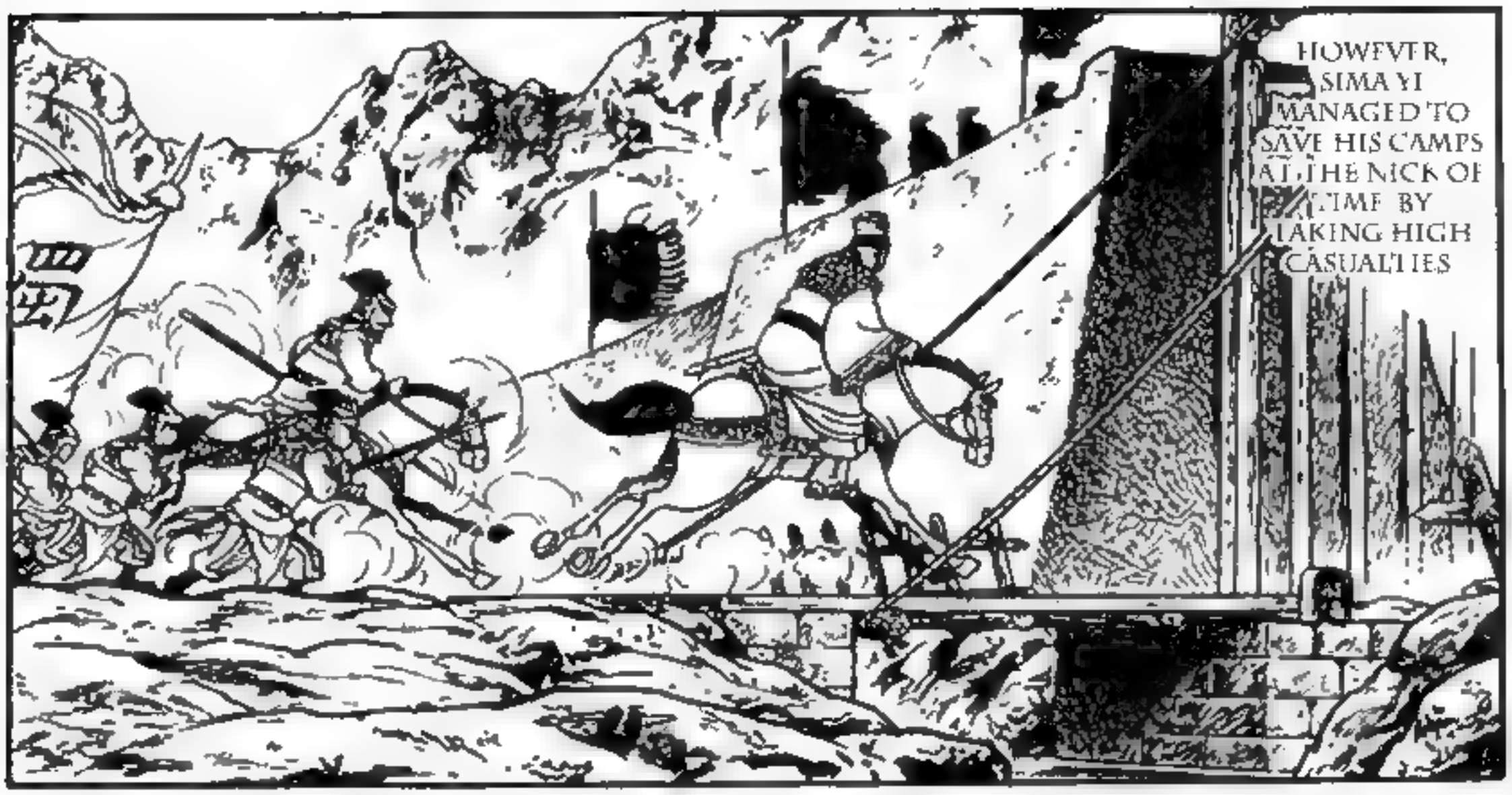
GIVE CHASE! DON'T LET A SINGLE MAN ESCAPE!

LOOK! THE WEI ARMY IS RETREATING! THE CHANCELLOR'S PLAN MUST HAVE BORNE FRUIT!

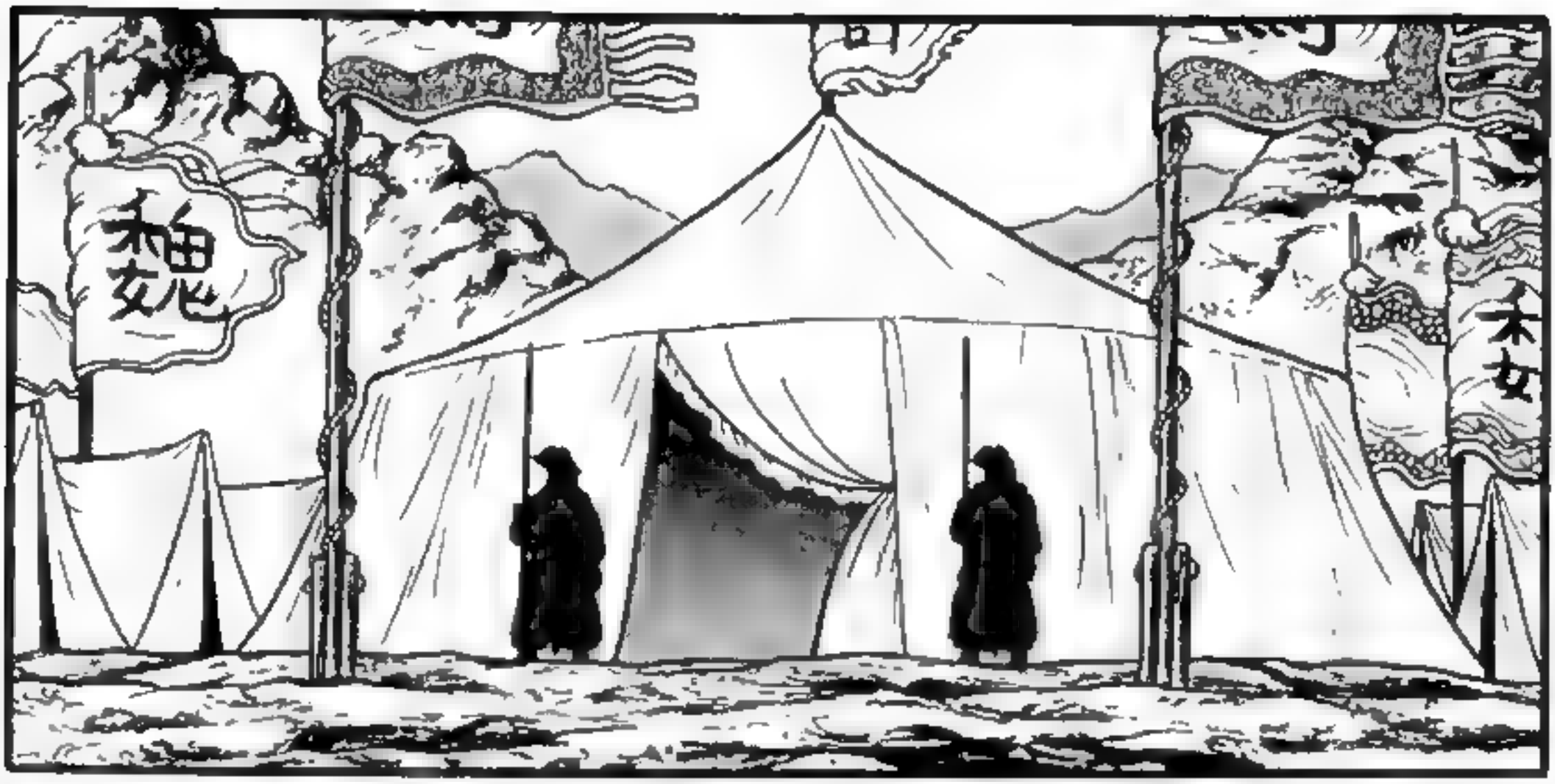


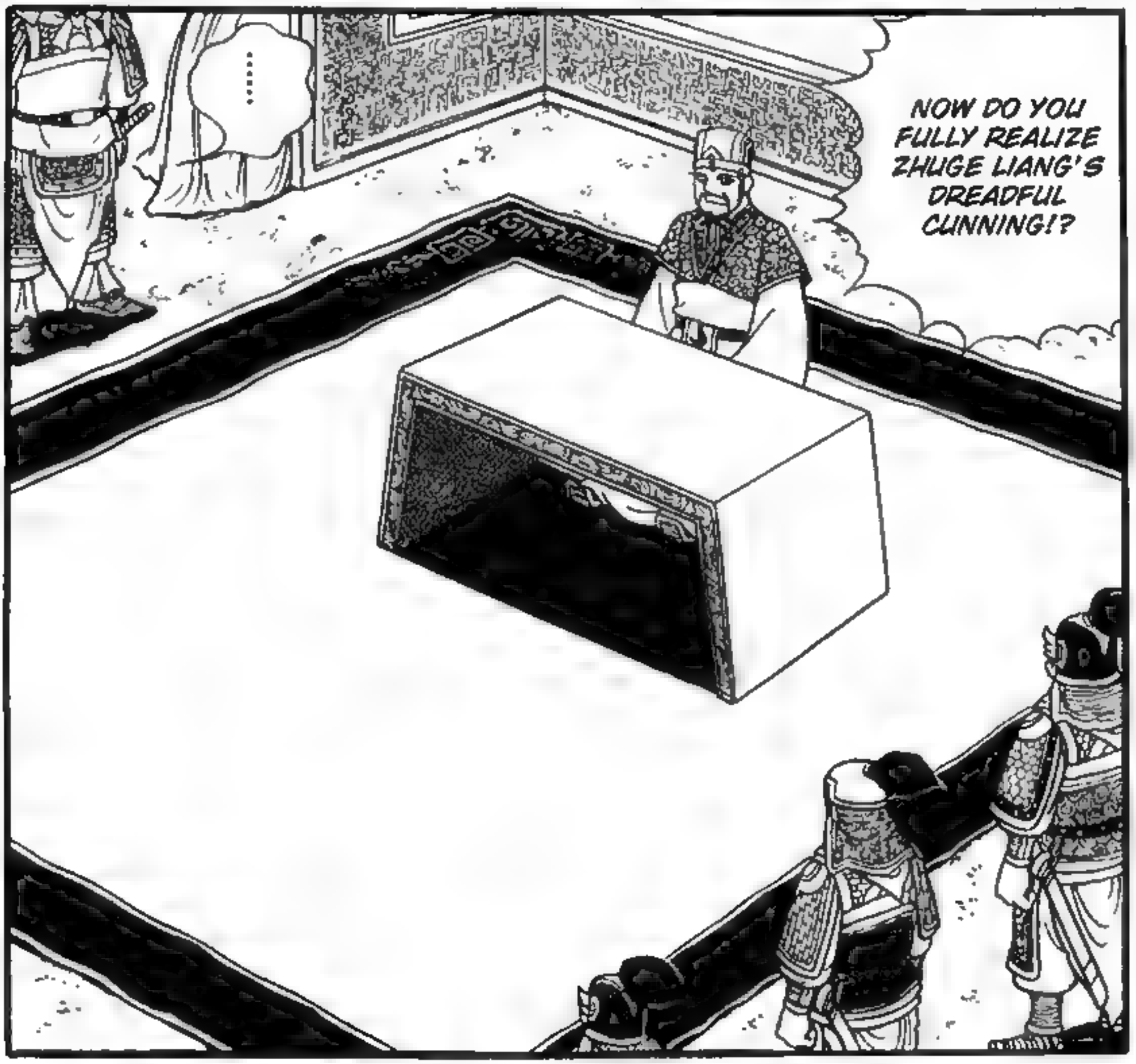


THE SUDDEN
WITHDRAWAL TURNED
INTO A PANICKED
RETREAT WHEN THE
WEI TROOPS WERE
HOTLY PURSUED BY
SHU FORCES


HOWEVER, SIMA YI MANAGED TO SAVE HIS CAMPS AT THE NICK OF TIME BY TAKING HIGH CASUALTIES

THUS, KONGMING FAILED TO CAPTURE THE CAMPS IN SPITE OF ROUTING THE WEI ARMY.
THE COMBINED CASUALTIES OF BOTH SIDES NUMBERED OVER 10,000 FROM THIS CLASH


未由女巫


……
NOW DO YOU FULLY REALIZE ZHUGE LIANG'S DREADFUL CUNNING!?

HAD THEY SUCCEEDED IN CAPTURING OUR CAMPS AS WELL, OUR DEFENSIVE POSITIONS HERE WILL HAVE TOTALLY CRUMBLED AND THE ROAD TO CHANG'AN WOULD BE WIDE OPEN!

THE ENEMIES SUSTAINED SIGNIFICANT CASUALTIES, BUT NOWHERE AS HIGH AS OURS. THE ENEMIES GOT THE BETTER OF US ONCE AGAIN!

THIS IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF RELYING ON HOT-HEADED COURAGE TO WIN BATTLES INSTEAD OF SOUND STRATEGY! FROM NOW ON, NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO TAKE OFFENSIVE ACTION WITHOUT MY ORDERS. THOSE WHO DISOBEY WILL BE EXECUTED WITHOUT EXCEPTION!

THUS, SIMA YI RETURNED TO DEFENDING ONCE MORE

YES, THE ENEMIES ARE CRITICALLY WEAKENED. WE MUST PRESS THEM EVEN HARDER NOW.

LOOK AT ALL THE HORSES, WEAPONS, ARMOUR, AND OTHER SUPPLIES WE'VE SEIZED FROM THE ENEMY ROUT, SIR! THIS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO SUPPORT OUR OFFENSIVE ALL THE WAY TO CHANG'AN.

SIR! A MESSENGER FROM CHENGDU HAS ARRIVED!

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蜀
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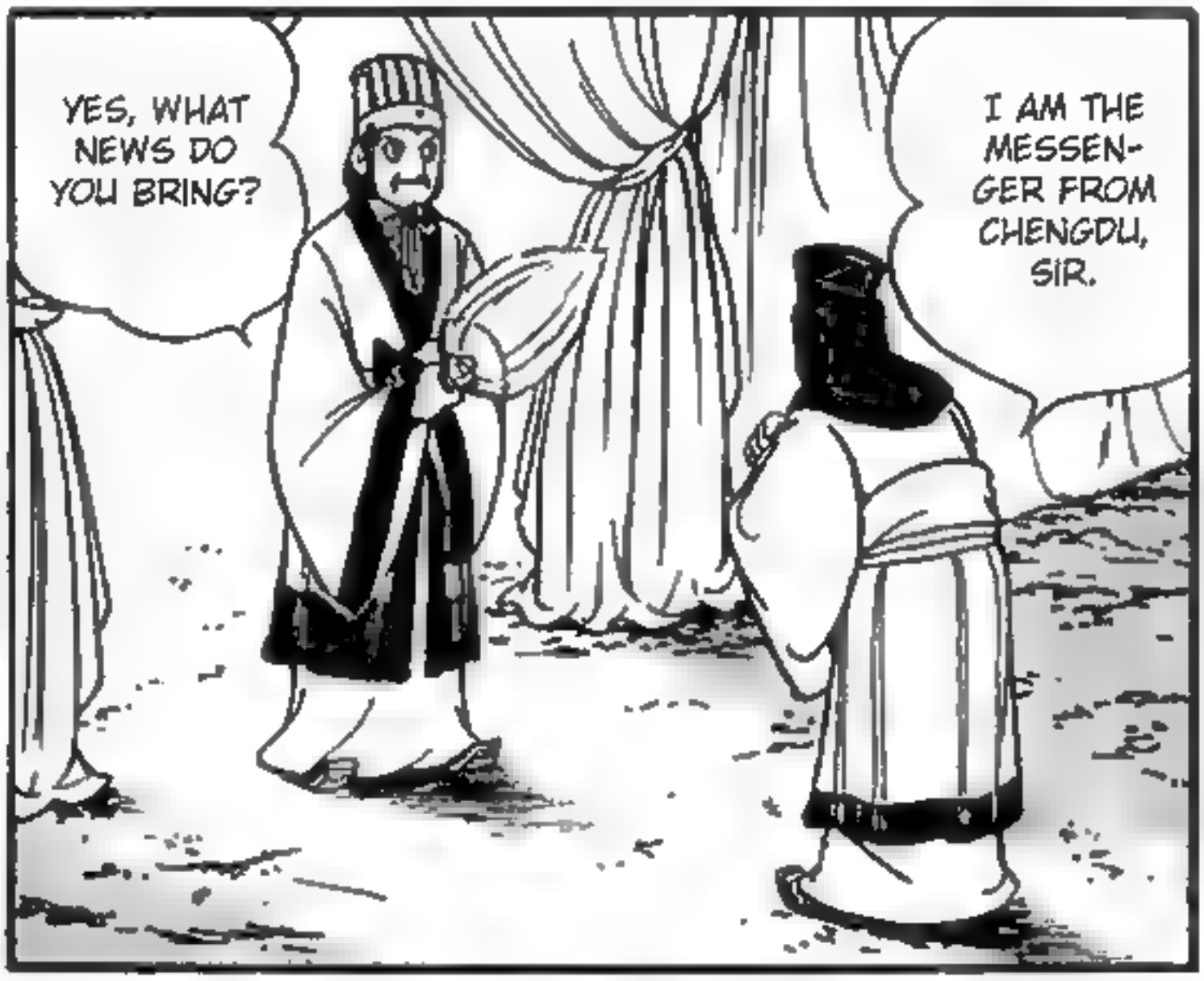
蜀
I WONDER WHY...?

I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT GENERAL ZHANG BAO HAS PASSED AWAY FROM HIS WOUNDS...

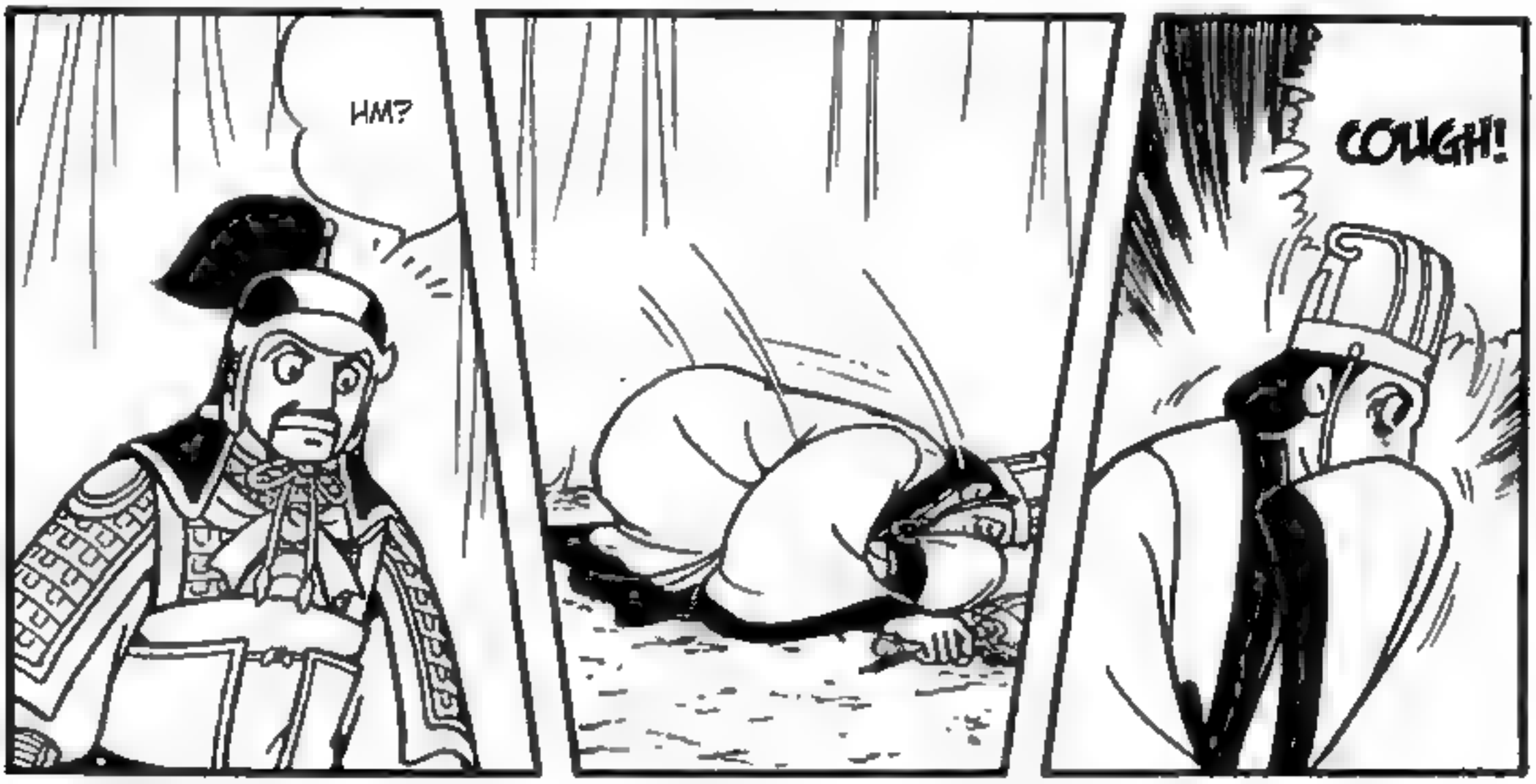

YES, WHAT NEWS DO YOU BRING?
I AM THE MESSEN-GER FROM CHENGDU, SIR.

WHAT!? ZHANG BAO IS DEAD!?

ZHANG BAO... YOU TOO HAVE LEFT ME NOW...?

HE... HE REALLY PASSED AWAY, DID HE...?

UU...


HM?
COUGH!

CHA-

CHANCELLOR? ARE YOU UNWELL?

B-BLOOD! HE'S COUGHED UP BLOOD!

AGHH!

THE TOLLS OF KONGMING'S CEASELESS EFFORTS DURING THE SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN CAMPAIGNS WERE NOW BEGINNING TO MANIFEST ON HIS HEALTH

DOCTOR! WE NEED A DOCTOR!

FOR 10 DAYS, KONGMING LAY SICK ON HIS BED
THANK YOU.
HERE IS YOUR MEDICINE, SIR.
YES, WE'VE KEPT YOUR SICKNESS TOP SECRET.
BY THE WAY, IS SIMA YI STILL IN THE DARK ABOUT MY ILLNESS?

WE MUST WITHDRAW TO HANZHONG WHILE HE IS STILL IN THE DARK.

GOOD. WERE HE TO FIND OUT I WAS LYING SICK, HE WOULD NOT HESITATE TO ATTACK.

YES, SIR. I WILL PASS ON THE ORDER TO THE OTHER OFFICERS AT ONCE.

SINCE WE TROUNCED THEM THOROUGHLY LAST TIME WHEN WE FEIGNED RETREAT, THERE WILL BE NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT AN ENEMY PURSUIT THIS TIME.

THAT NIGHT, THE SHU ARMY BROKE CAMP AND QUIETLY WITHDREW BACK TO HANZHONG

YES, THERE'S NO TRACE OF THEM HERE ANYMORE.

WHAT!? SHU FORCES HAVE WITHDRAWN TO HANZHONG!?

司馬

AFTER QUESTIONING SOME LOCALS, WE FOUND OUT THEY RETREATED 5 DAYS AGO.

UNBELIEVABLE! I WAS CERTAIN HE WOULD PRESS ON THE ATTACK AFTER CRIPPLING OUR FORCES, WHICH IS WHY I FOCUSED ON DEFENDING OUR POSITIONS...

5 DAYS AGO!?

WHAT!?

ACCORDING TO THE LOCALS' RUMOURS, ZHUGE LIANG SUPPOSEDLY FELL INTO A SERIOUS ILLNESS.

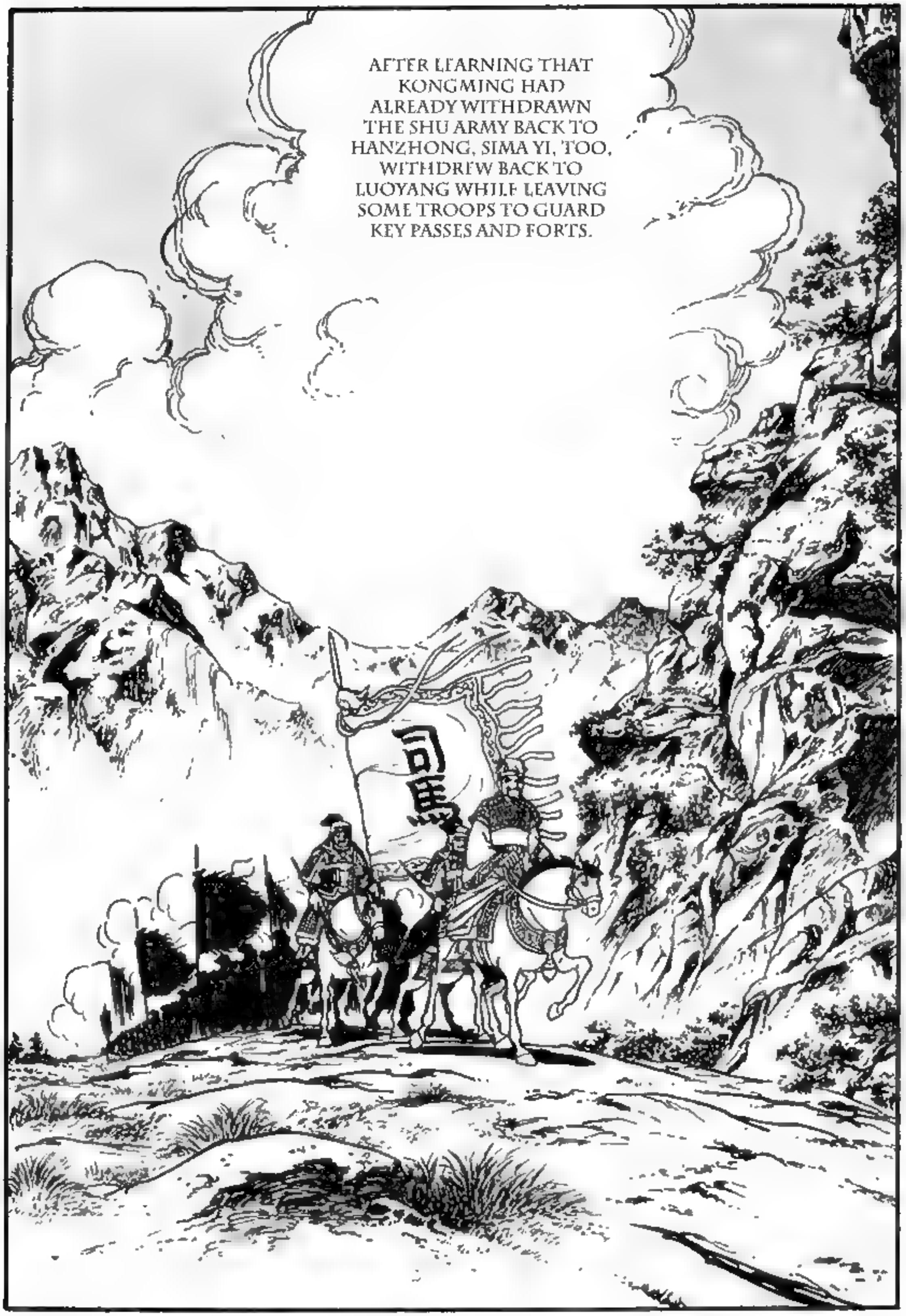
YES, SIR.

VERY WELL, YOU MAY EXCUSE YOURSELF.

IF THOSE RUMOURS ARE TRUE, THEN I LET A ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY SLIP BETWEEN MY FINGERS...

ZHUGE LIANG KONGMING .. THAT MAN APPEARS LIKE A GOD AND DISAPPEARS LIKE A DEMON. ONLY THE HEAVENS COULD PREDICT HIM...

.....


AFTER LEARNING THAT
KONGMING HAD
ALREADY WITHDRAWN
THE SHU ARMY BACK TO
HANZHONG, SIMA YI, TOO,
WITHDREW BACK TO
LUOYANG WHILE LEAVING
SOME TROOPS TO GUARD
KEY PASSES AND FORTS.

QUESTIONING

YES, I HAVE RECOVERED COMPLETELY.

IT IS GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN, CAO ZHEN. ARE YOU FEELING BETTER NOW?

YES, I'VE ALSO HEARD HE MAY HAVE POSSIBLY COUGHED UP BLOOD.

YOUR MAJESTY, I'VE HEARD THAT ZHUGE LIANG IS CURRENTLY LYING SICK IN HANZHONG.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN HAS SHU CROSSED THE BORDERS TO CAUSE CHAOS WITHIN OUR EMPIRE. IF WE DO NOT SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ATTACK SHU, THEY WILL MOST CERTAINLY MOUNT ANOTHER INVASION ONCE ZHUGE LIANG RECOVERS. I THUS URGE YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY TO GRANT SIMA YI AND ME AN ARMY TO SEIZE HANZHONG.

A SHU WITHOUT ZHUGE LIANG IS NOTHING TO FEAR.

YES, HANZHONG IS TEMPORARILY VULNERABLE DURING ZHUGE LIANG'S ILLNESS.

INVADE SHU!?

WHAT IS IT, YOUR MAJESTY?

THERE IS ONE MATTER WHICH TROUBLES ME.

HMM, WHILE THAT IS A VALID POINT,

OF COURSE, YOUR MAJESTY.

SIMA YI IS CURRENTLY TRAVELLING TOWARDS JINGZHOU TO OBSERVE ENEMY MOVEMENTS. I WILL DECIDE AFTER I HEAR HIS REPORT.

WU. IT IS POSSIBLE IF WE SEND ARMIES TO INVADE SHU, WU IN TURN WILL SEND ARMIES TO INVADE US.

YES, I WISHED TO CONSULT YOU ON A CERTAIN MATTER, LIU YE.

DID YOUR MAJESTY CALL FOR ME?

CAO ZHEN URGED THAT I SEND ARMIES TO INVADE SHU.

THE PEACE AND SECURITY OF WEI CAN NEVER BE ASSURED AS LONG AS SHU EXISTS. SINCE ZHUGE LIANG IS CURRENTLY ILL, NOW WOULD BE THE BEST CHANCE TO ATTACK.

DO YOU THINK IT IS INDEED BEST TO ATTACK OR NO?

YES, NOT SEIZING SHU WHILE POSSIBLE WILL CAUSE WEI TO REGRET FOR A CENTURY.

SO YOU AGREE WITH CAO ZHEN?

YES, YOUR MAJESTY.

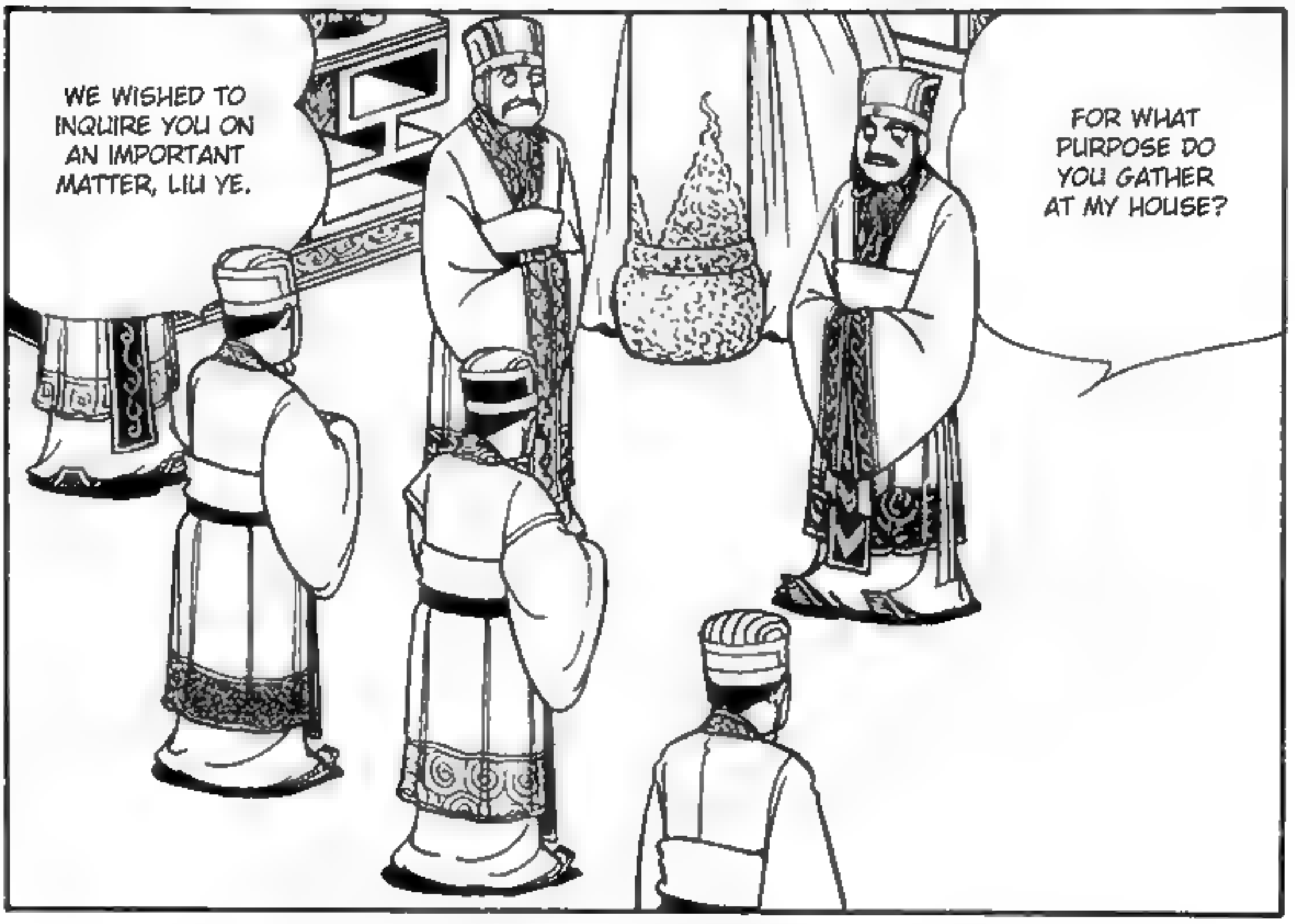
VERY WELL, START PREPARING THE INVASION THEN.

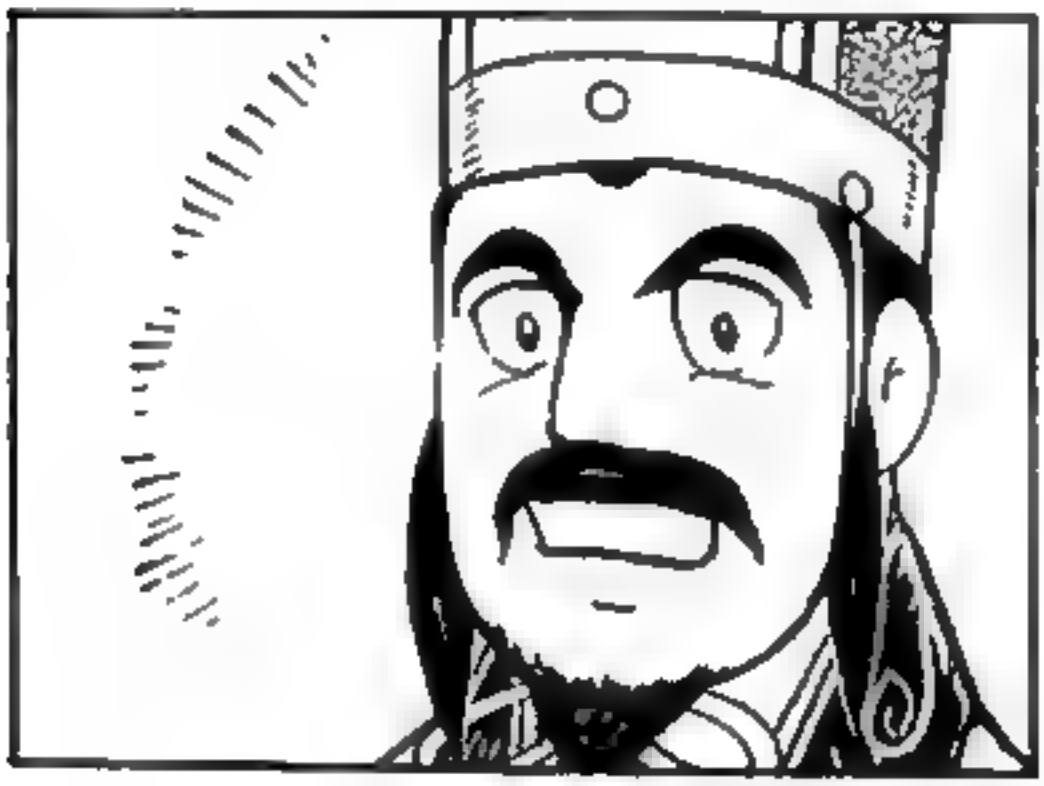
YES, YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

TELL SIMA YI TO COME BACK TO COURT IMMEDIATELY.

MINISTERS?

MASTER, A CROWD OF MINISTERS WISH TO SPEAK WITH YOU.


WE WISHED TO INQUIRE YOU ON AN IMPORTANT MATTER, LIU YE.
FOR WHAT PURPOSE DO YOU GATHER AT MY HOUSE?



IS IT TRUE THAT A GRAND ARMY WILL BE RAISED AND SENT TO INVADE SHU THIS FALL?

?

PARDON?

DO YOU GENTLEMEN REALLY THINK SHU CAN BE SO EASILY INVADED?

NO, BUT THERE ARE RUMOURS OF AN INVASION CIRCULATING AT COURT...

THE EMPEROR IS NOT UNAWARE OF THIS FACT. IF HE WERE TO SEND MEN AND HORSES INTO SHU LANDS, WEI WILL CERTAINLY SUFFER MANY CASUALTIES. DO YOU THINK OUR EMPEROR WOULD MAKE SUCH A CARELESS DECISION?

SURELY, YOU ARE NOT UNAWARE OF THE TREACHEROUS MOUNTAIN PATHS AND ALL THE RIVERS FORMING A NATURAL BARRIER AROUND SHU. OVERCOMING NATURE'S GREAT WALL IS A DIFFICULT FEAT FOR MERE HUMANS.

SO THEY ARE MERELY FALSE RUMOURS?

AS IMPORTANT MINISTERS, YOU HAVE BETTER THINGS TO SPEND YOUR TIME ON THAN TO PAY HEED TO SUCH RUMOURS, NO?

NO, HE DID NOT.

DID THE EMPEROR NOT SUMMON YOU TODAY TO CONSULT YOU ON THIS VERY MATTER?

NOW IF YOU UNDERSTAND, THEN I MUST ASK YOU TO EXCUSE YOURSELVES.

PERHAPS YOU HEARD WRONG?

THIS IS VERY STRANGE... THE EMPEROR TOLD ME HIMSELF THAT HE'D BE CONSULTING LIU YE ON THE POSSIBILITY OF INVADING SHU TODAY...

THAT IS ALSO WHY HE SENT A MESSENGER TO SUMMON SIMA YI BACK AT ONCE!
NO, I'M CERTAIN! I HEARD THE EMPEROR SAY IT DIRECTLY!
LET US GO ASK HIS MAJESTY HIMSELF TOMORROW.
HMM, I WONDER WHAT IS GOING ON...

LIU YE SAID THAT?

CORRECT ME IF I AM MISTAKEN, YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY, BUT LIU YE ADVISED YOU TO ATTACK SHU YESTERDAY, DID HE NOT? BECAUSE THE OTHER MINISTERS AND I WENT OVER TO HIS HOUSE LAST NIGHT, AND THERE HE SPOKE EMPHATICALLY THAT INVADING SHU WOULD BE A WASTE OF HUMAN LIVES AND RESOURCES.

HMM...

IF HE DID, HE MAY BE PURPOSELY DECEIVING YOUR MAJESTY. HE MUST BE QUESTIONED ONCE MORE TO DETERMINE WHAT EXACTLY IS GOING ON AND WHETHER HE DESERVES PUNISHMENT.

YES, YOUR MAJESTY.

SUMMON LIU YE AT ONCE.

THE MESSINGER QUICKLY RUSHED TO LIU YI'S RESIDENCE

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

LIU YE, DID YOU TELL THE OTHER MINISTERS YESTERDAY THAT SHU MUST NOT BE INVADED? WHERE DOES YOUR HEART TRULY LIE?

IT SEEMS YOU'VE TOLD OTHERS THAT WAR IS UNFAVOUR-ABLE ALTHOUGH YOU TOLD ME THAT NOT GOING TO WAR WILL LEAVE A CENTURY-LONG REGRET FOR WEI.

I HEARD INCORRECTLY!?

I BELIEVE YOUR MAJESTY HEARD INCORRECTLY.

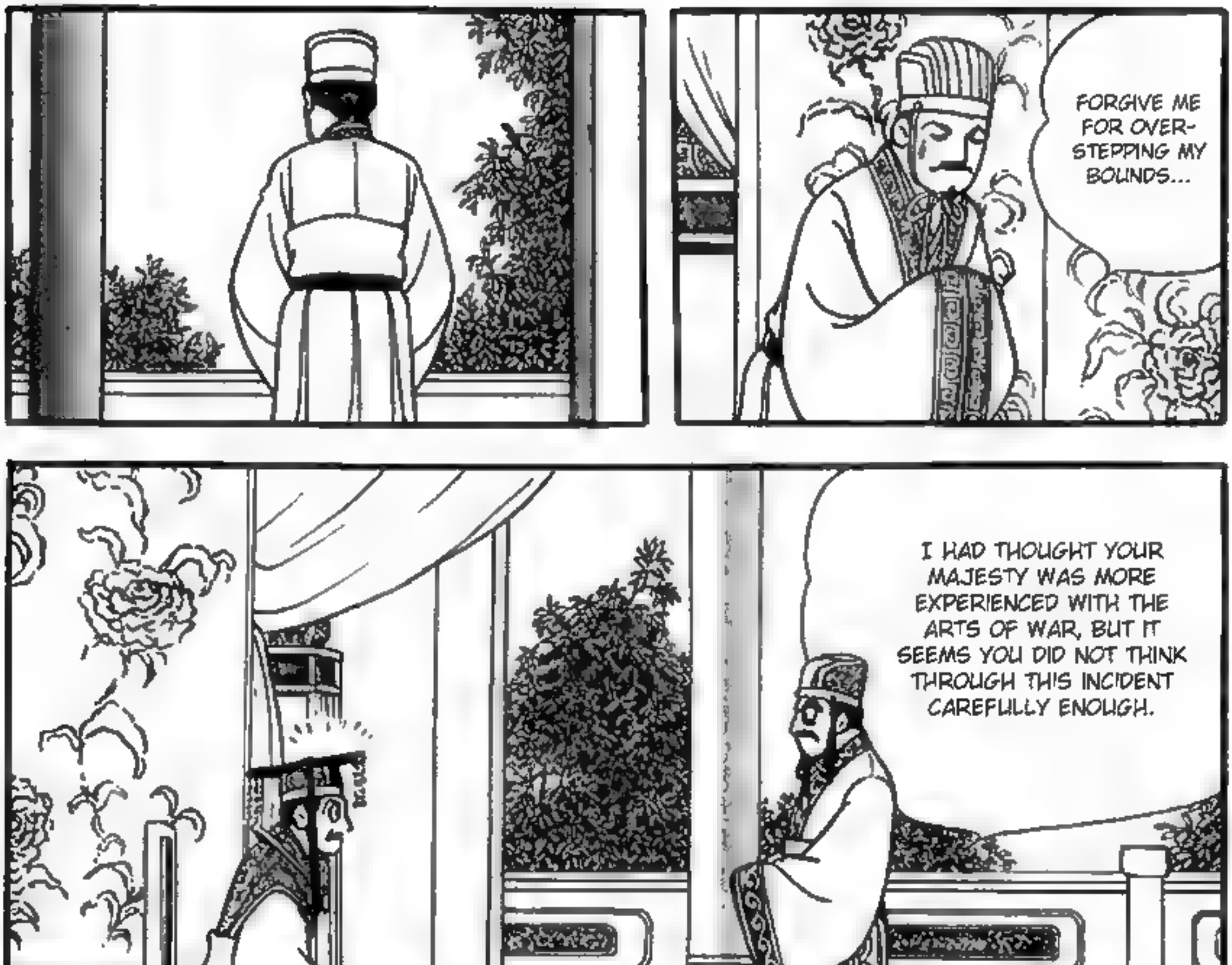
MY OPINION IS THE SAME AS EVER. SINCE SHU'S NATURAL DEFENSES ARE FORMIDABLE, SENDING A LARGE ARMY TO INVADE ITS LAND IS A COSTLY ENDEAVOUR WHICH WILL SAP OUR EMPIRE'S STRENGTH AND LEAVE IT VULNERABLE.

SO YOU ARE SURE HIS MAJESTY HEARD YOU INCORRECTLY WHEN HE-

DEFENDING AGAINST AN ENEMY INVASION IS ONE THING, BUT MOUNTING AN OFFENSIVE INVASION IS TOO RISKY, YOUR MAJESTY.

MORE IMPORTANTLY, AS THIS IS A MATTER OF MILITARY POLICY, IT IS NOT THE PLACE FOR YOU TO BUTT YOUR HEAD IN, YANG JIN!

YES, THAT IS THE CASE!


FORGIVE ME FOR OVER-STEPPING MY BOUNDS...
I HAD THOUGHT YOUR MAJESTY WAS MORE EXPERIENCED WITH THE ARTS OF WAR, BUT IT SEEMS YOU DID NOT THINK THROUGH THIS INCIDENT CAREFULLY ENOUGH.
WHEN I ADVISED YOU TO INVADE SHU YESTERDAY, THAT WAS CLEARLY A SECRET MATTER UPON WHICH A STATE'S FORTUNE RELIES... IT MUST NOT BE DIVULGED TO ANYONE OTHER THAN THE RELEVANT PERSONNEL.

SO THAT WAS THE REASON...

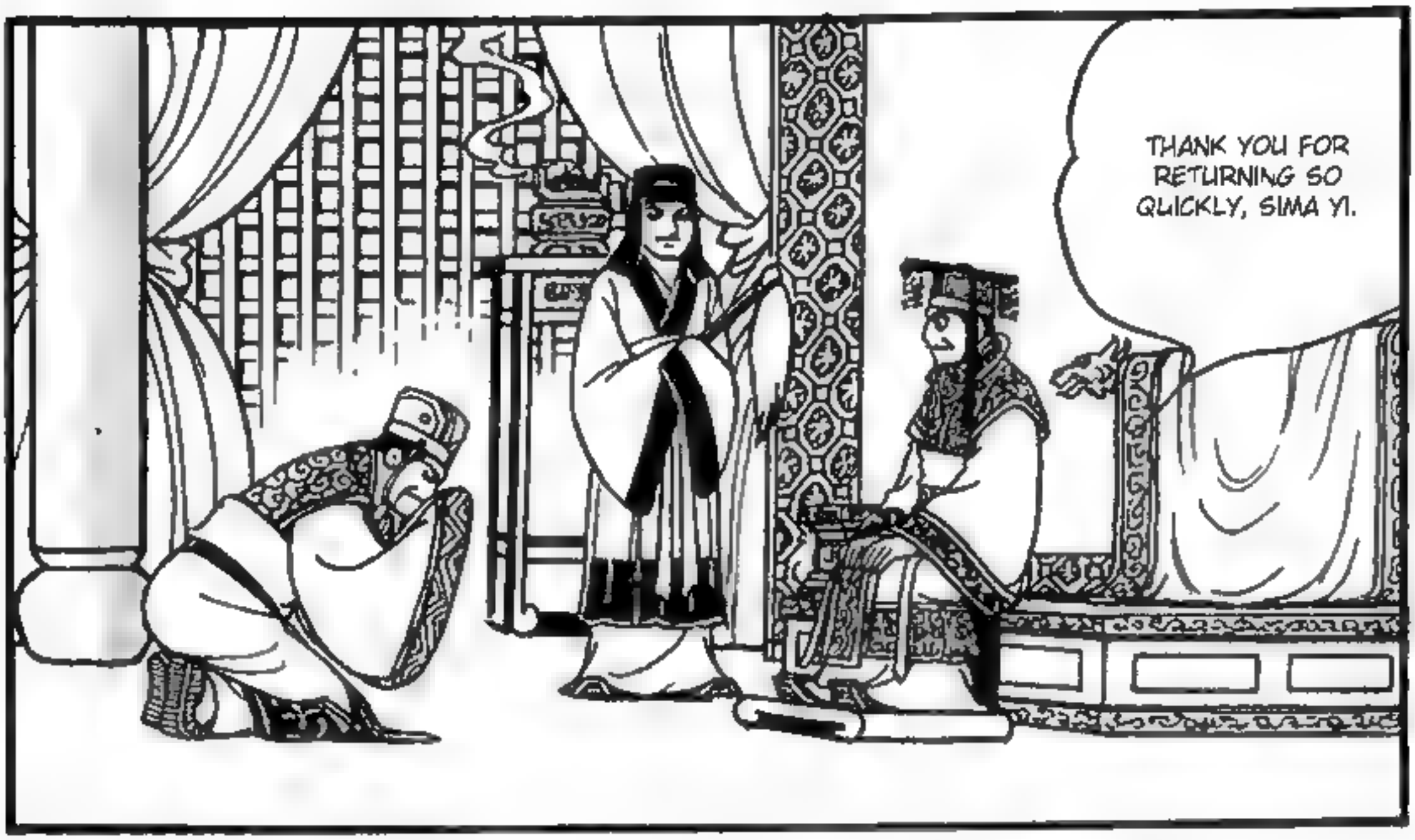
SO PLEASE BE CAREFUL TO PREVENT OTHER UNINVOLVED COURTIERS OR PALACE ATTENDANTS FROM FINDING OUT, YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

NEVER FORGET THE LANGUAGE OF WAR IS DECEPTION. ONE MUST HIDE ONE'S TRUE INTENTIONS UNTIL THE VERY LAST MOMENT OF EXECUTION. MY OPPOSITE RESPONSES TO YOUR MAJESTY AND THE OTHER MINISTERS WAS BECAUSE OF THIS.

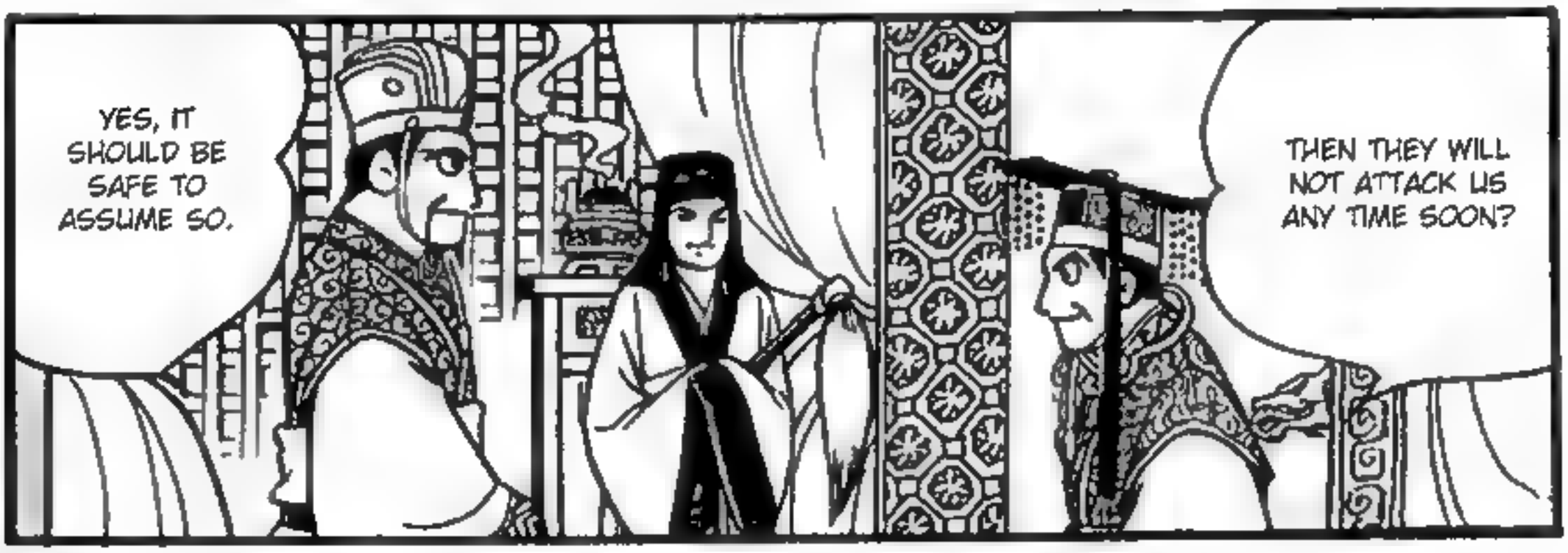
YOU FLATTER THIS SERVANT OF LITTLE TALENT.

YOUR STERN WORDS JUST NOW ARE MORE VALUABLE THAN ANY GOLD, SILVER, OR JADE JEWEL. I AM TREMENDOUSLY GRATEFUL.

WEI INVASION



WU STILL SEEMS TO SHOW NO REAL SIGNS OF ATTACKING. THEY CONTINUE TO MAKE ONLY FALSE SIGNS OF ATTACK IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE ALLIANCE WITH SHU.



I COMPLETELY SUPPORT THAT IDEA AS WELL, YOUR MAJESTY.

EXCELLENT. YOU SEE, CAO ZHEN AND LIU YE HAVE BOTH RECOMMENDED I SEND AN ARMY TO CAPTURE HANZHONG WHILE ZHUGE LIANG IS STILL SICK.

THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR IF ZHUGE LIANG DOES NOT TAKE COMMAND OF THE SHU ARMY.

SO YOU AGREE TOO?

YES, YOUR MAJESTY.

THEN I'VE DECIDED. CAO ZHEN AND YOU WILL LEAD THE INVASION OF HANZHONG.

400,000 WEI TROOPS WERE MOBILIZED FOR THIS INVASION

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WHILE SIMA YI WAS NAMED SECOND IN COMMAND

CAO ZHEN WAS NAMED COMMANDER-IN CHIEF OF THE WESTERN EXPEDITION,

LIU YE WAS MADE ARMY INSTRUCTOR
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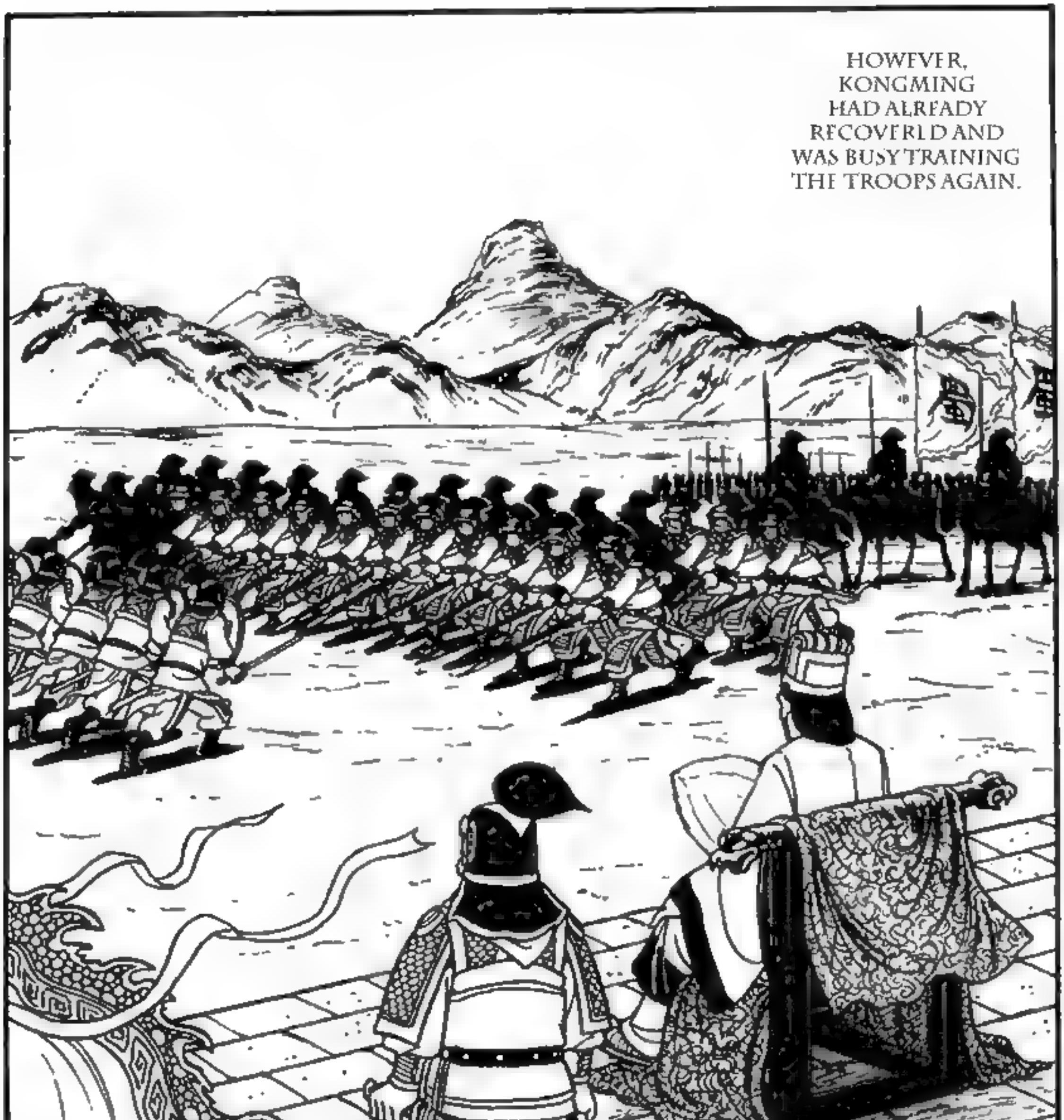
INTENDING TO MAKE A BEELINE FOR HANZHONG, THE GRAND ARMY HEADED FOR JIANMEN PASS


HOWEVER, KONGMING HAD ALREADY RECOVERED AND WAS BUSY TRAINING THE TROOPS AGAIN.

A MESSENGER NOW ARRIVED TO DELIVER THE NEWS OF THE INVASION

YES, AND THEY NUMBER 400,000!

WEI HAS SENT AN INVASION FORCE TO TAKE HANZHONG?

WANG PING, ZHANG NI.

THEN I'LL EXCUSE MYSELF

VERY WELL. THANK YOU FOR INFORMING ME.

TAKE A THOUSAND TROOPS TO BLOCK OFF THE ROAD AT CHENCANG SO AS TO DELAY THE WEI ADVANCE. I WILL FOLLOW SHORTLY BEHIND WITH OUR MAIN ARMY.

YES?

YES?

HOW WILL WE DELAY THEM IF THEY TRY TO OVERWHELM US WITH SHEER NUMBERS?

D-DID WE HEAR YOU CORRECTLY, CHANCELLOR? THE ENEMY FORCE IS 400,000-STRONG AND YOU WANT US TO ONLY TAKE A THOUSAND TROOPS?

IF IT IS OUR LIVES YOU SECRETLY WISH, THEN PLEASE JUST EXECUTE US HERE, SO AS TO AT LEAST SPARE THE LIVES OF THE 1000 TROOPS WE WOULD OTHERWISE BE LEADING TO THEIR DEATHS.

DO NOT WORRY. EVEN IF YOU WERE TO FAIL, I WOULD NOT HOLD YOU RESPONSIBLE IN THE SLIGHTEST. NOW ENOUGH TALK AND GET GOING.

DON'T BE FOOLISH! I AM CLEARLY SENDING ONLY A THOUSAND TROOPS BECAUSE I HAVE A PLAN.

WHEN I READ THE SKIES YESTERDAY, I NOTICED THAT THE NET MANSION (TAURUS CONSTELLATION) WAS HANGING IN THE SAME TRAJECTORY AS THE MOON. MY CONCLUSION IS THAT THERE WILL BE A GREAT RAINFALL WHICH COMES ONLY AROUND ONCE A DECADE.

YES.

A GREAT RAINFALL? REALLY, SIR?

NO MATTER HOW MANY TROOPS THE WEI ARMY HAS, THE TREACHEROUS MOUNTAIN PATHS AND HEAVY RAINFALL WILL MAKE IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO ADVANCE. YOU TWO WILL NOT BE HARMED.

JUST BE SURE TO TAKE THE HIGHER GROUND AT CHENCANG TO PREPARE FOR THE RAIN.

A LARGE RAINFALL ALWAYS FOLLOWED AFTER THESE SIGNS OF HEAVEN.

YES, CHANCELLOR.

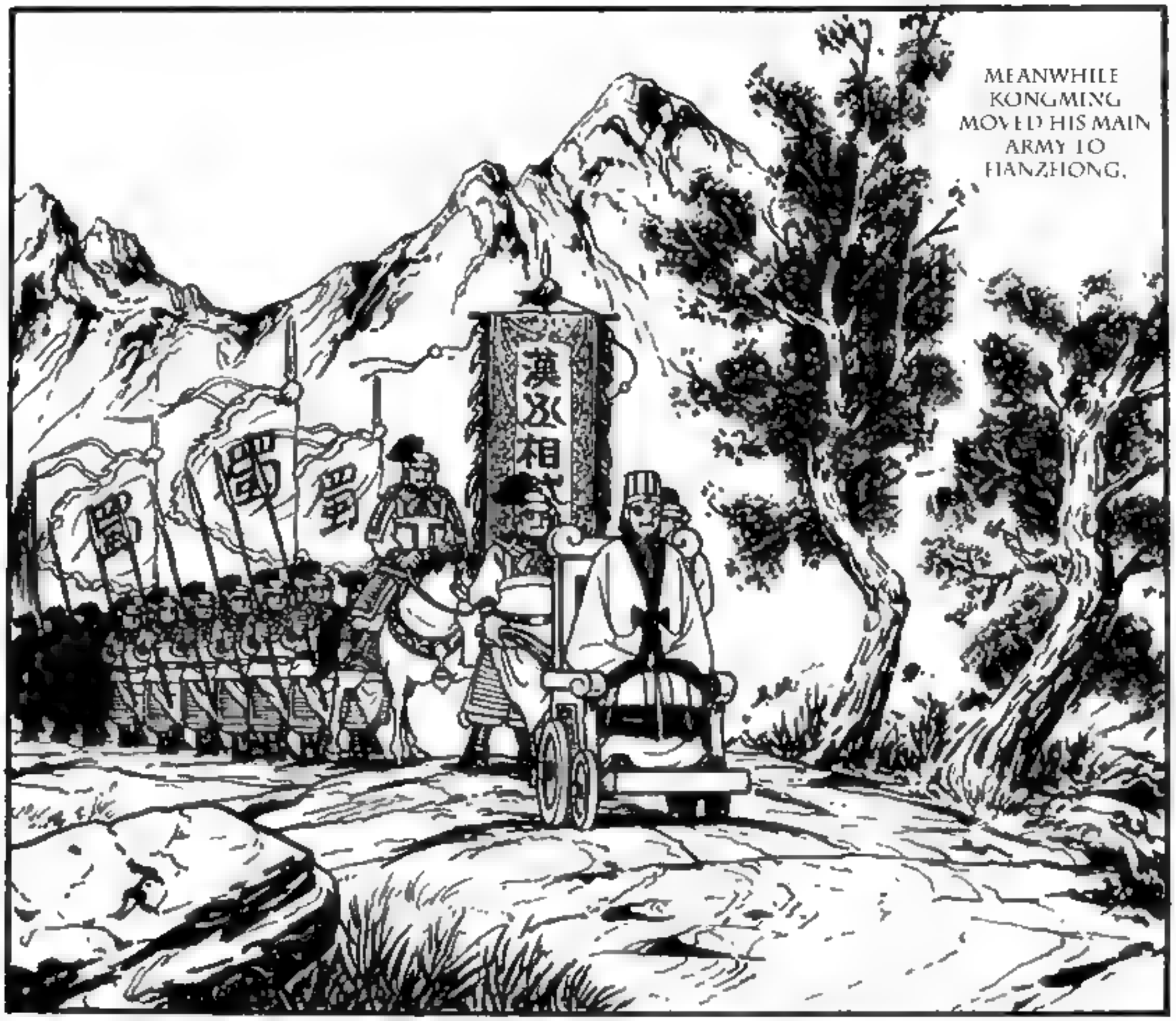
ONCE THE RAIN STOPS, I WILL SET OUT FROM HERE WITH OUR ARMY AND STRIKE DOWN THE WEARY WEI ARMY. I GUARANTEE YOU NEED NOT WORRY SO MAKE HASTE TO CHENCANG.

BUT THE CHANCELLOR'S READINGS OF THE HEAVENS HAVE NOT EVEN ONCE BEEN INACCURATE.

THEN WE WILL FIGHT TO THE DEATH.
BUT WHAT IF THE RAIN DOESN'T COME?

TRUE, I SUPPOSE WE MUST PLACE OUR FAITH IN HIM.

ALTHOUGH WANG PING AND ZHANG NI COULD NOT ENTIRELY SHAKE OFF THEIR DOUBTS THEY QUICKLY SET OUT FOR CHENCANG


MEANWHILE KONGMING MOVED HIS MAIN ARMY TO HANZHONG.
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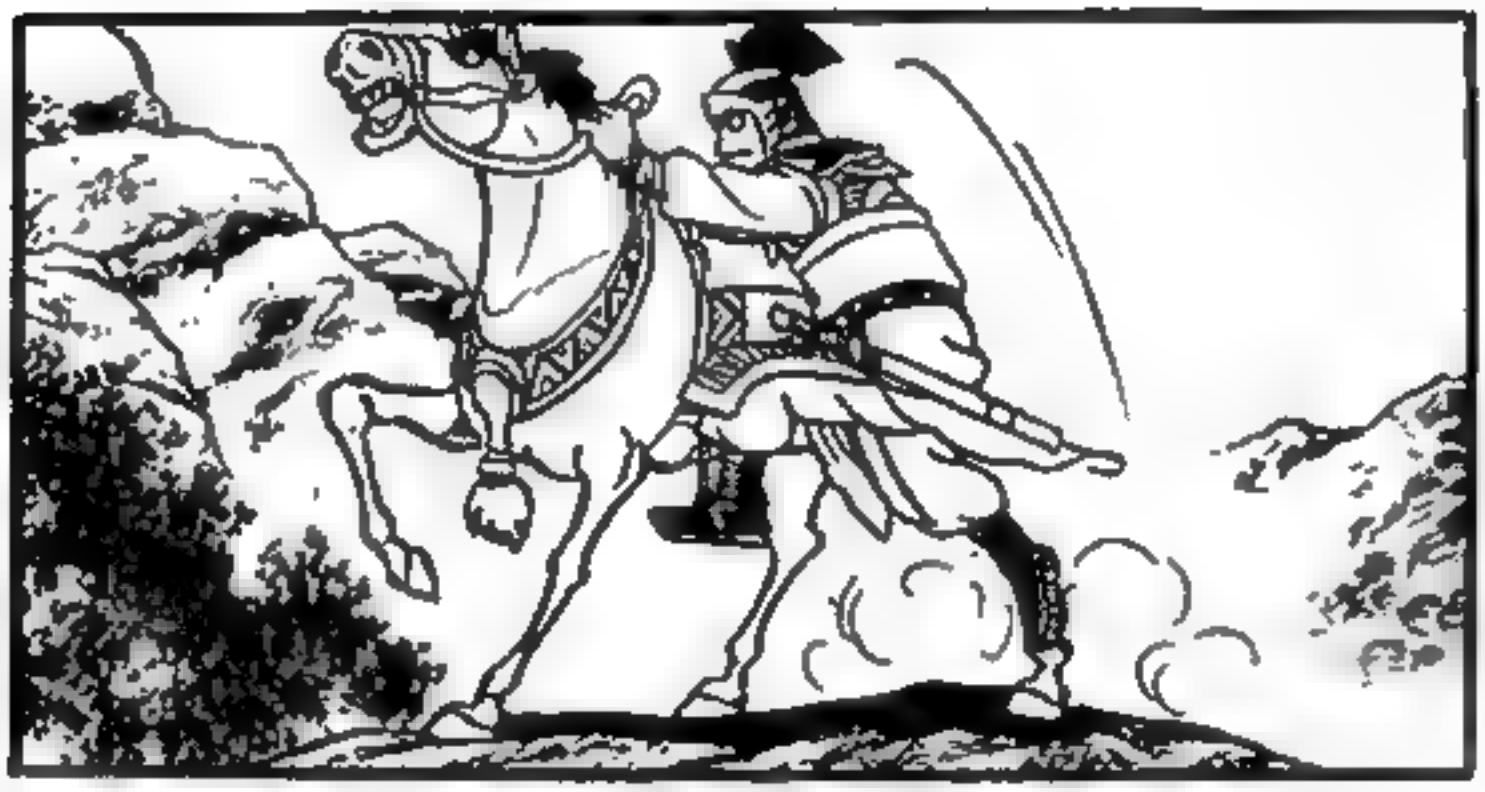
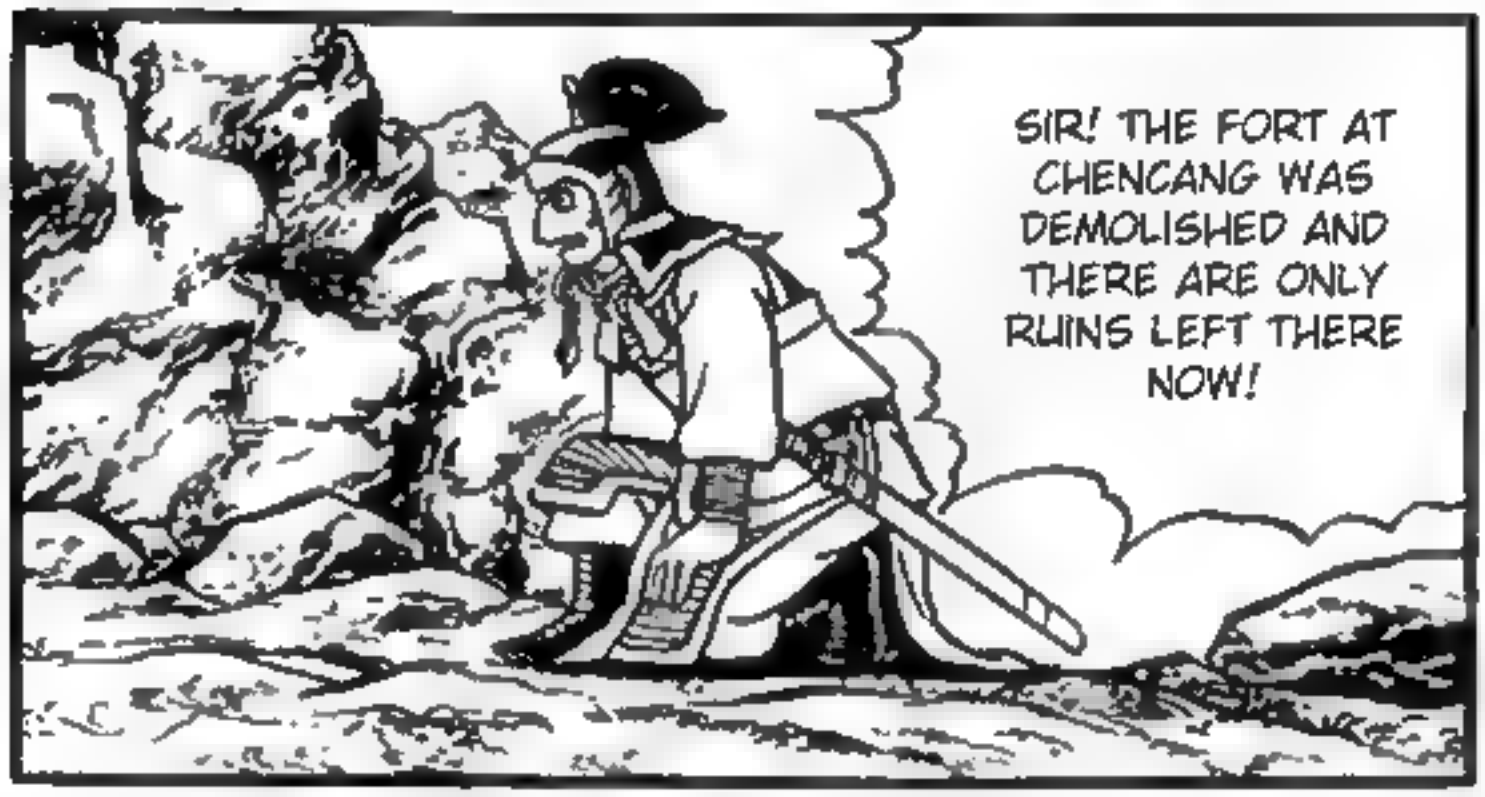
AND SAW TO IT THAT EVERY STATION POST AND FORT WAS STOCKED WITH AMPLE GRAIN, STRAW AND FIREWOOD TO PREPARE FOR THE LARGE RAINFALL.

RAINFALL




SIR! THE FORT AT CHENCANG WAS DEMOLISHED AND THERE ARE ONLY RUINS LEFT THERE NOW!

RIGHT.
LET'S SEE FOR OUR-SELVES.

DEMOLISHED?

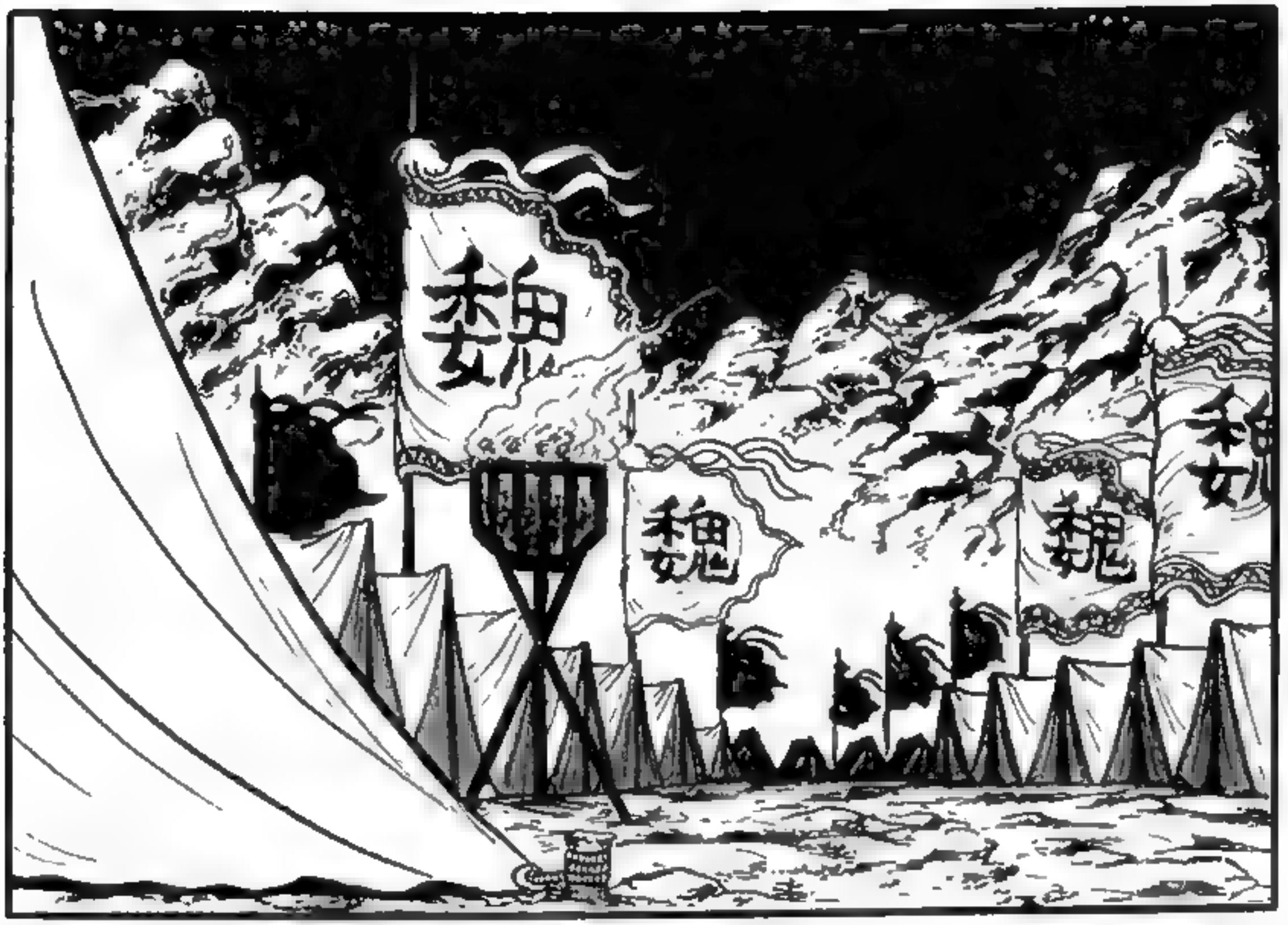
A THOROUGH JOB, INDEED. WE WON'T BE ABLE TO MAKE USE OF THE FORT ANYTIME SOON IN THIS CONDITION...

HE'S MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO STORE SUPPLIES HERE OR BORROW FOOD FROM THE LOCALS.

THIS IS CLEARLY ZHUGE LIANG'S WORK.

EVEN THE INTERIOR HAS BEEN DEMOLISHED. THERE'S NOT A SINGLE LIVING ANIMAL OR PLANT HERE.

WE WILL ADVANCE FARTHER AND MAKE CAMP SOMEPLACE ELSE.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PARDON MY INTRU-SION.

WHAT'S THIS ALL OF A SUDDEN?

COMMANDER, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD HALT OUR ADVANCE TEMPORARILY.

NET MANSION? HANGING IN THE SAME TRAJEC-TORY? WHAT DOES THAT SIGNIFY?

UPON READING THE SKIES, I NOTICED THAT THE NET MANSION IS HANGING IN THE SAME TRAJECTORY AS THE MOON.

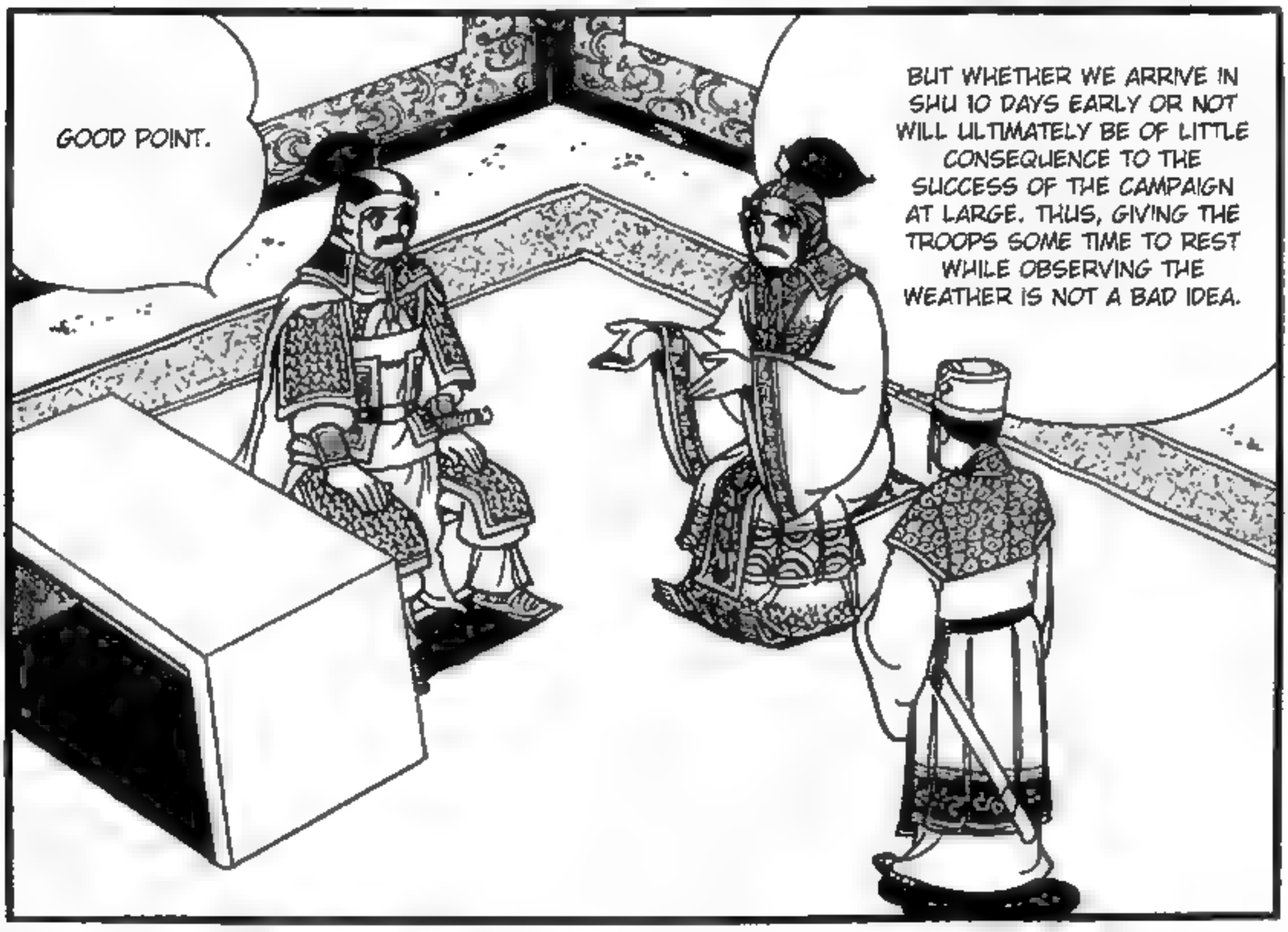
.....

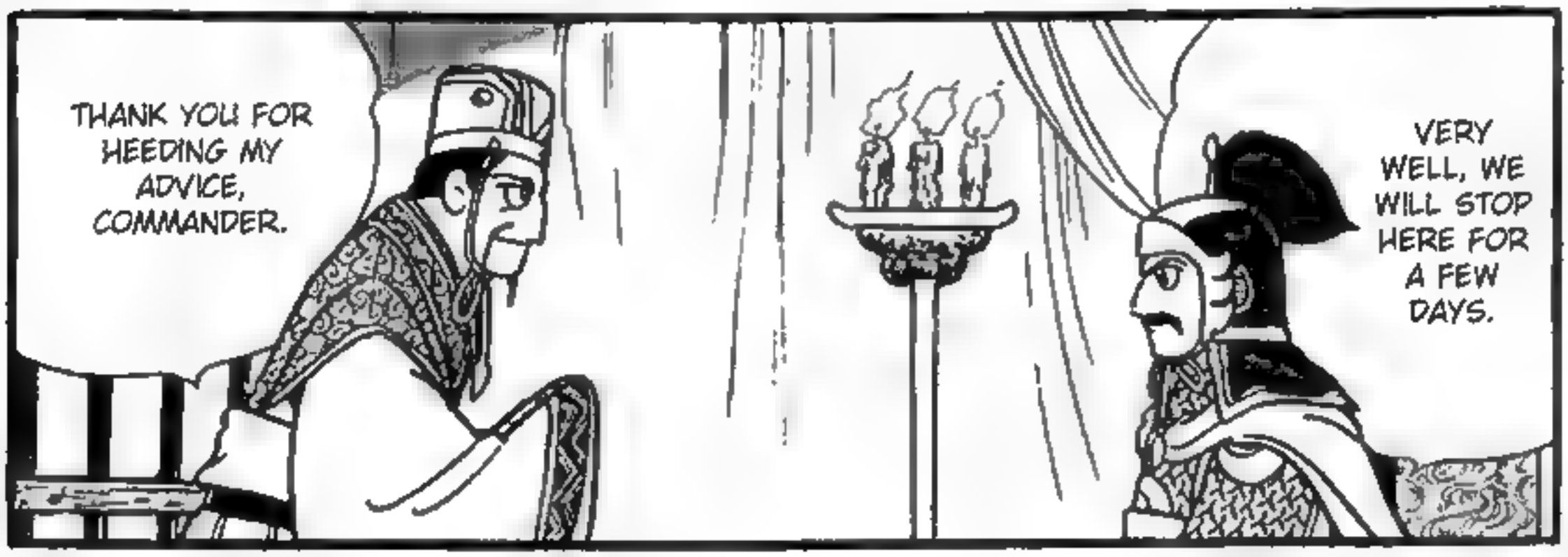
I SUGGEST WE SET UP A PROPER CAMP WITH TEMPORARY RAIN SHELTERS, AND OBSERVE THE WEATHER BEFORE PROCEEDING.

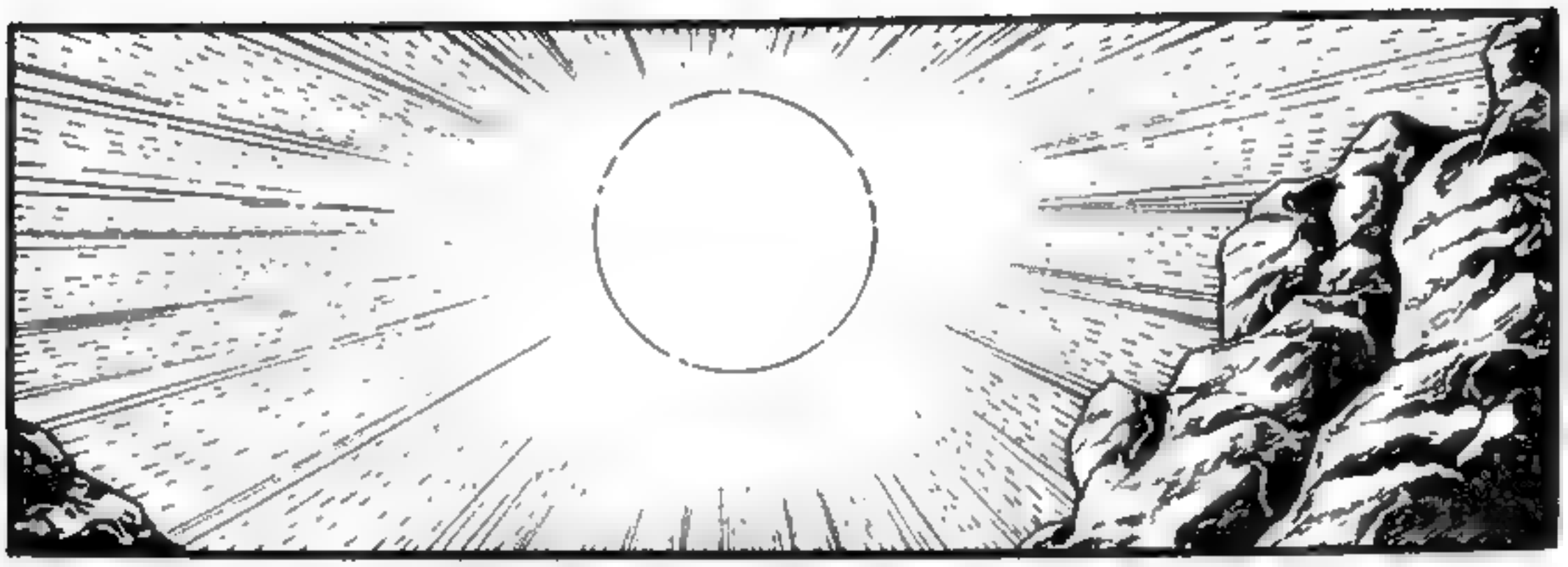
IT'S BEEN RECORDED SINCE LONG PAST THAT SUCH SIGNS ARE FOLLOWED BY AN UNUSUALLY LARGE RAINFALL. IF WE WERE TO ADVANCE DEEP INTO ENEMY LANDS AND THEN HIT WITH LARGE RAINSTORMS, IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO EVEN RETREAT, MUCH LESS ADVANCE.

WELL, I AM NOT KNOWL-EDGEABLE IN THE SIGNS OF THE HEAVEN,

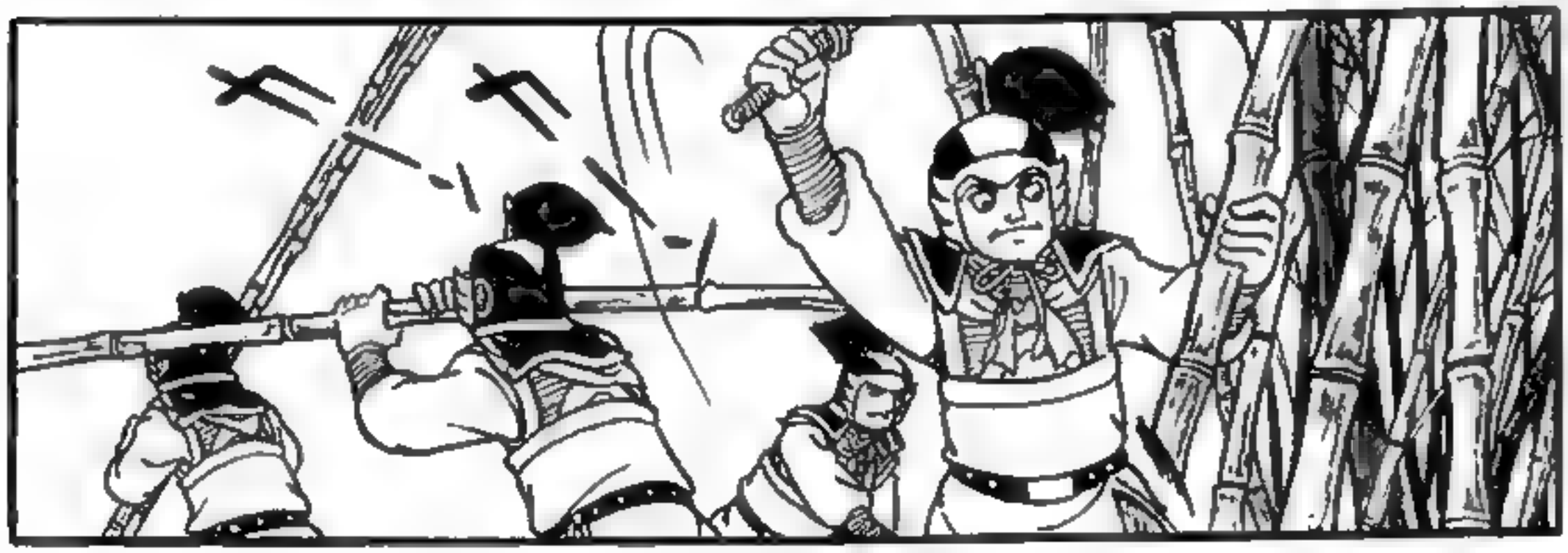
WHAT DO YOU THINK, LIU YE?


GOOD POINT.
BUT WHETHER WE ARRIVE IN SHU 10 DAYS EARLY OR NOT WILL ULTIMATELY BE OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE TO THE SUCCESS OF THE CAMPAIGN AT LARGE. THUS, GIVING THE TROOPS SOME TIME TO REST WHILE OBSERVING THE WEATHER IS NOT A BAD IDEA.


THANK YOU FOR HEEDING MY ADVICE, COMMANDER.
VERY WELL, WE WILL STOP HERE FOR A FEW DAYS.

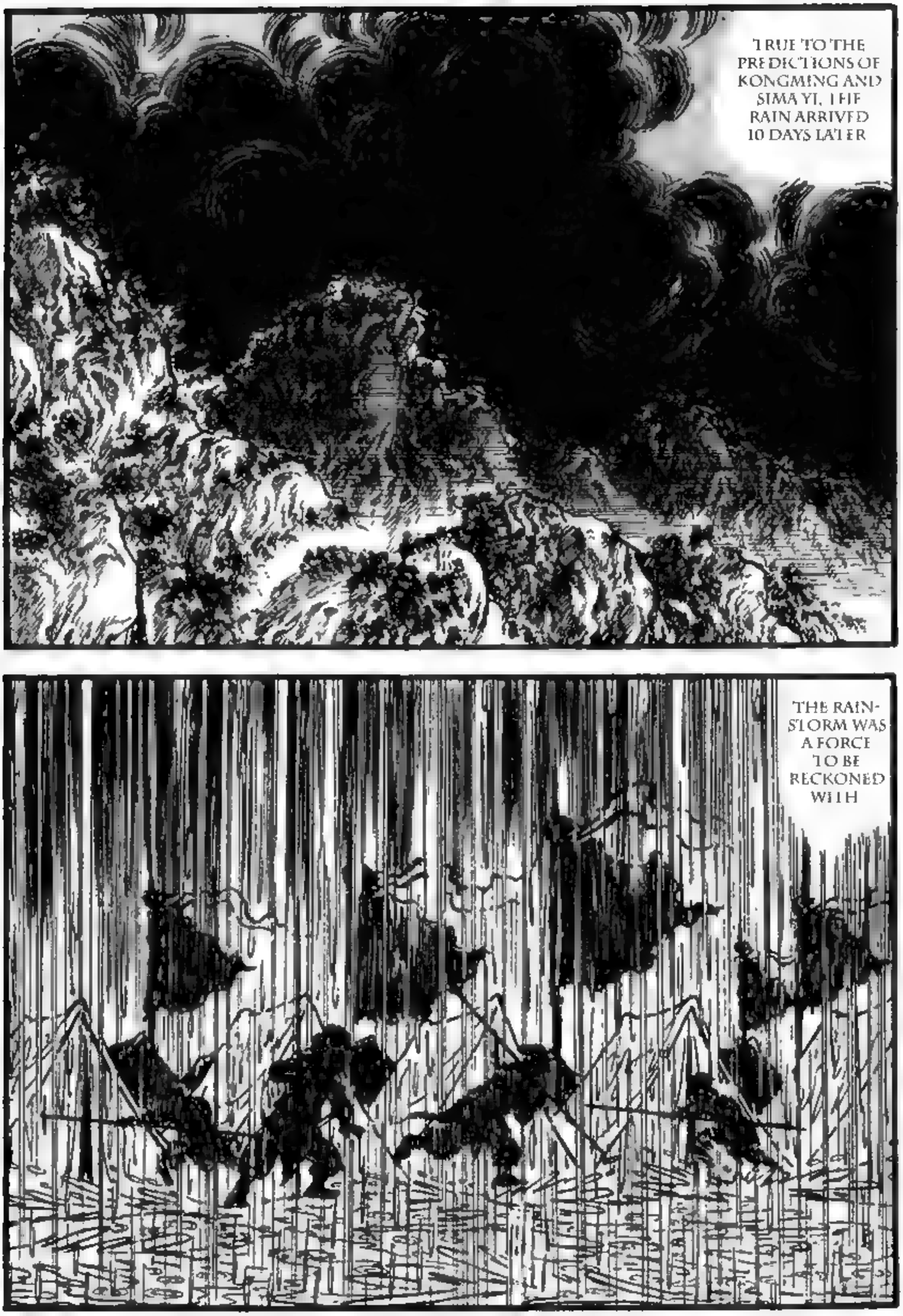


YES, SIR.
START GATHERING WOOD TO BUILD STILT HOUSES ON A HILL FOR THE COMMANDER AND OFFICERS.



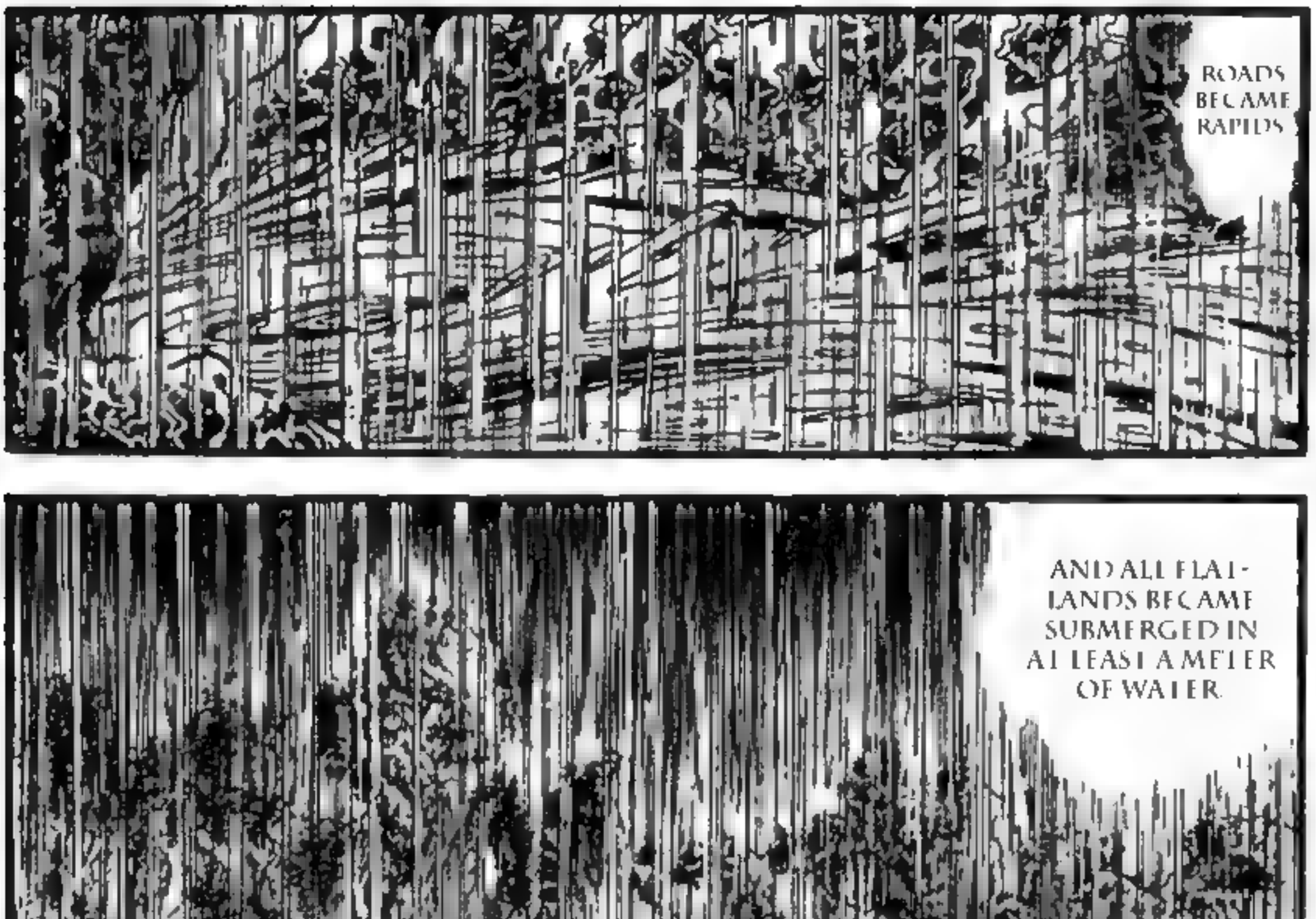
I DON'T KNOW... IF IT DOESN'T, SIMA YI WILL FEEL QUITE EM BAR RASED...

DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'LL RAIN, LIU YE?


TRUE TO THE PREDICTIONS OF KONGMING AND SIMA YI, THE RAIN ARRIVED 10 DAYS LATER
THE RAIN-STORM WAS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

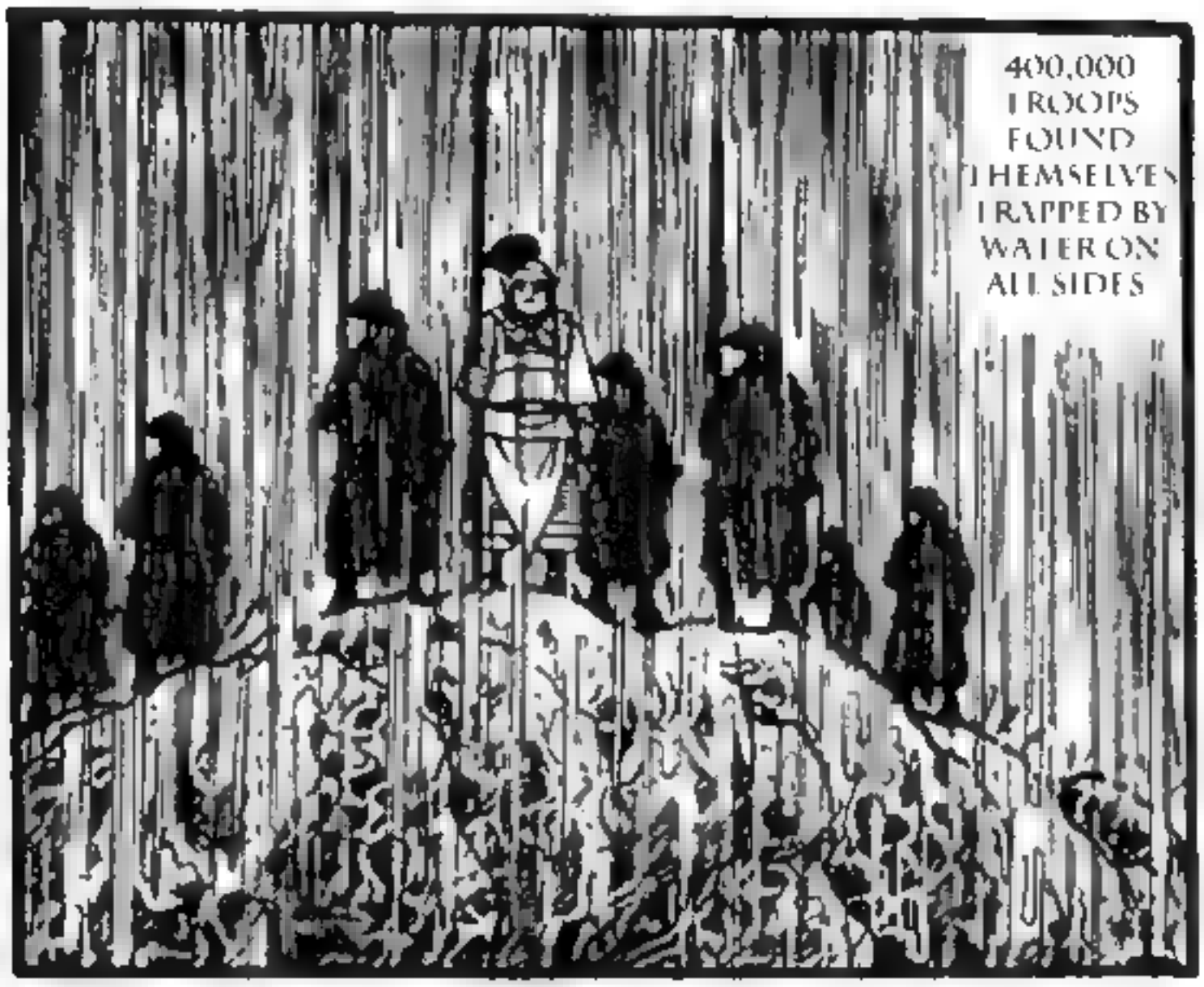
CLIFFS BECAME WATER FALLS.

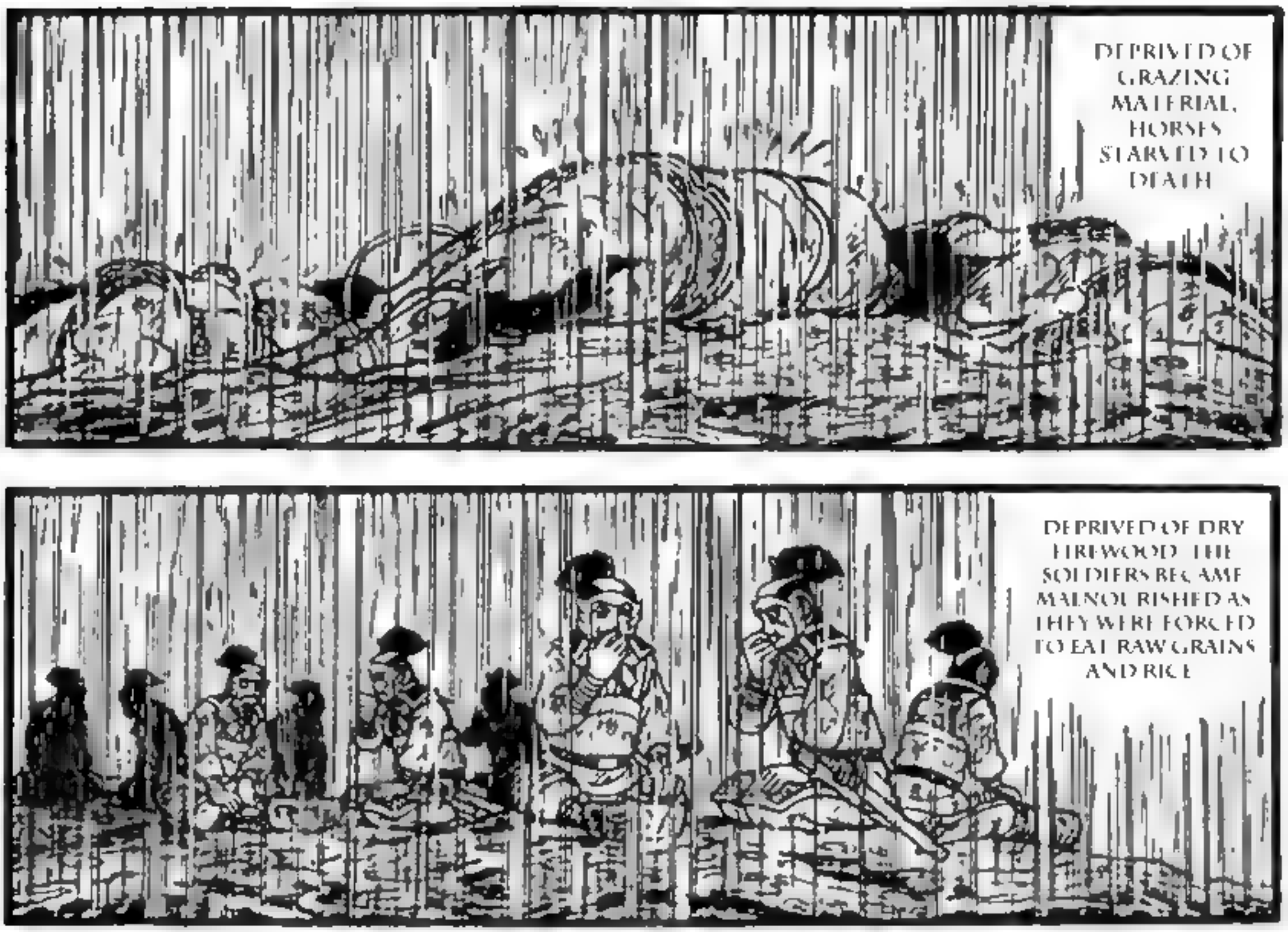
FROM MORNING TO NIGHT AND BACK TO MORNING AGAIN, THE RAIN FELL WITHOUT SIGNS OF STOPPING

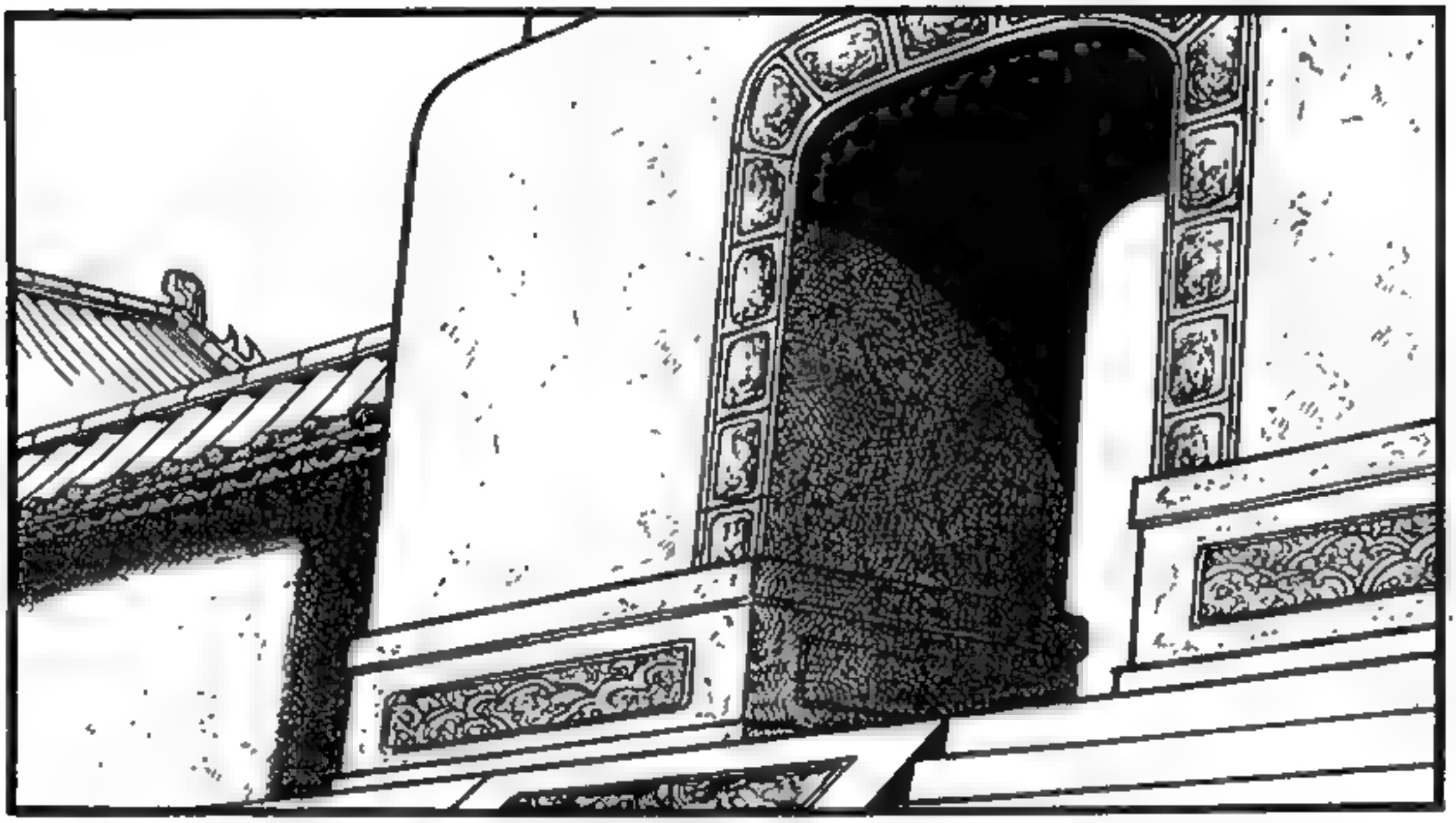

ROADS
BECAME
RAPIDS
AND ALL FLAT-
LANDS BECAME
SUBMERGED IN
AT LEAST A METER
OF WATER
THE WET
TROOPS
WERE
FORCED
TO SEEK
HIGHER
GROUND

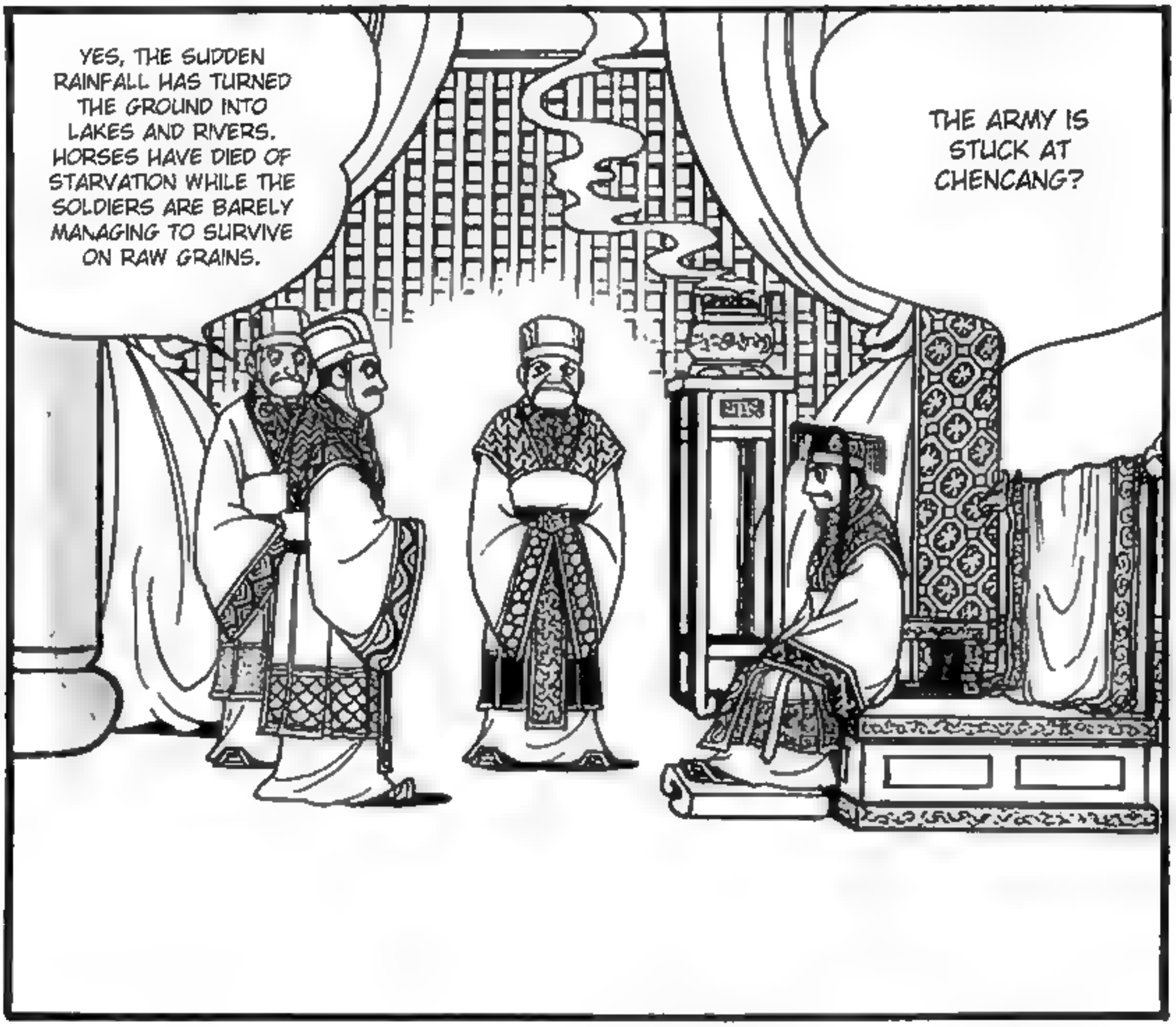
AS
VALLEYS
BECAME
AKES

STILL, THE RAIN
SHOWED NO
SIGNS OF
SLOWING DOWN
MUCH LESS
STOPPING


400,000
TROOPS
FOUND
THEMSELVES
TRAPPED BY
WATER ON
ALL SIDES


DEPRIVED OF GRAZING MATERIAL, HORSES STARVED TO DEATH
DEPRIVED OF DRY FIREWOOD THE SOLDIERS BECAME MALNOURISHED AS THEY WERE FORCED TO EAT RAW GRAINS AND RICE
AS SOLDIERS BEGAN TO FALL ILL AND DIE, DISEASES ALSO BROKE OUT AMONGST THE CAMPS.




YES, THE SUDDEN RAINFALL HAS TURNED THE GROUND INTO LAKES AND RIVERS. HORSES HAVE DIED OF STARVATION WHILE THE SOLDIERS ARE BARELY MANAGING TO SURVIVE ON RAW GRAINS.
THE ARMY IS STUCK AT CHENCANG?

THIS IS TERRIBLE! WE MUST SEND AID AT ONCE.

EPIDEMICS HAVE ALSO BROKE OUT IN THE CAMPS TO FURTHER REDUCE THE ARMY'S MORALE.

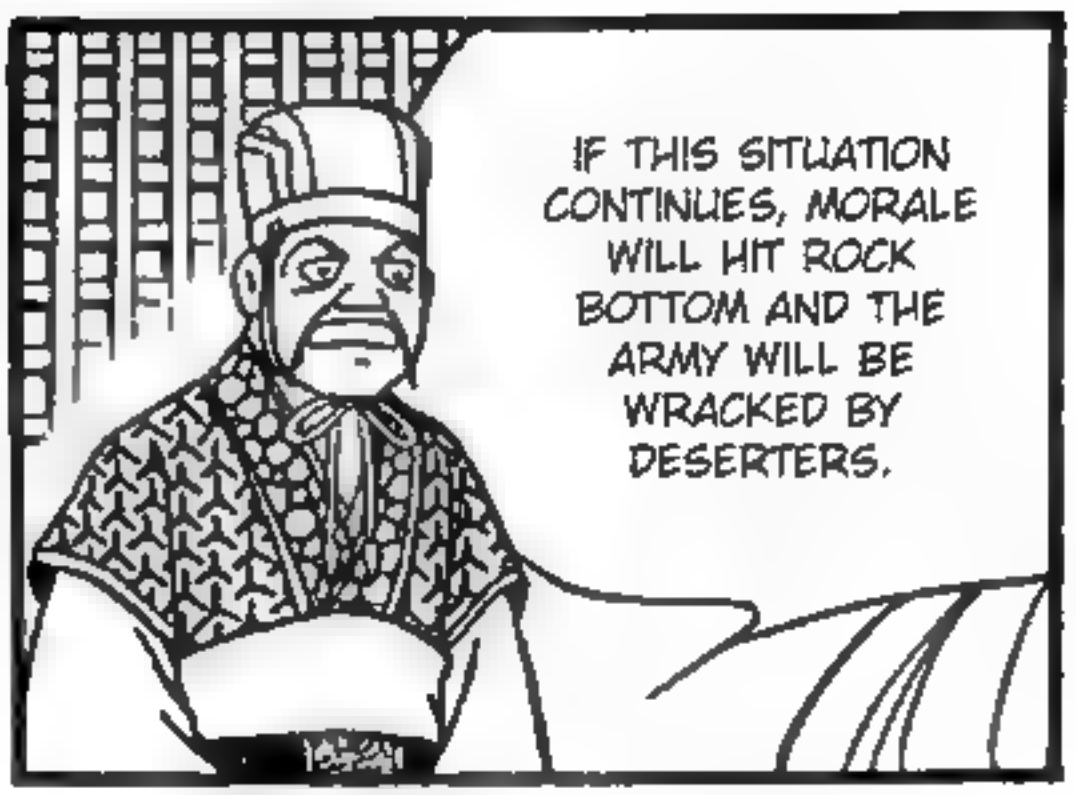
HM...

UNFORTUNATELY, THE FLOODED ROADS MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SEND FOOD AND OTHER SUPPLIES.

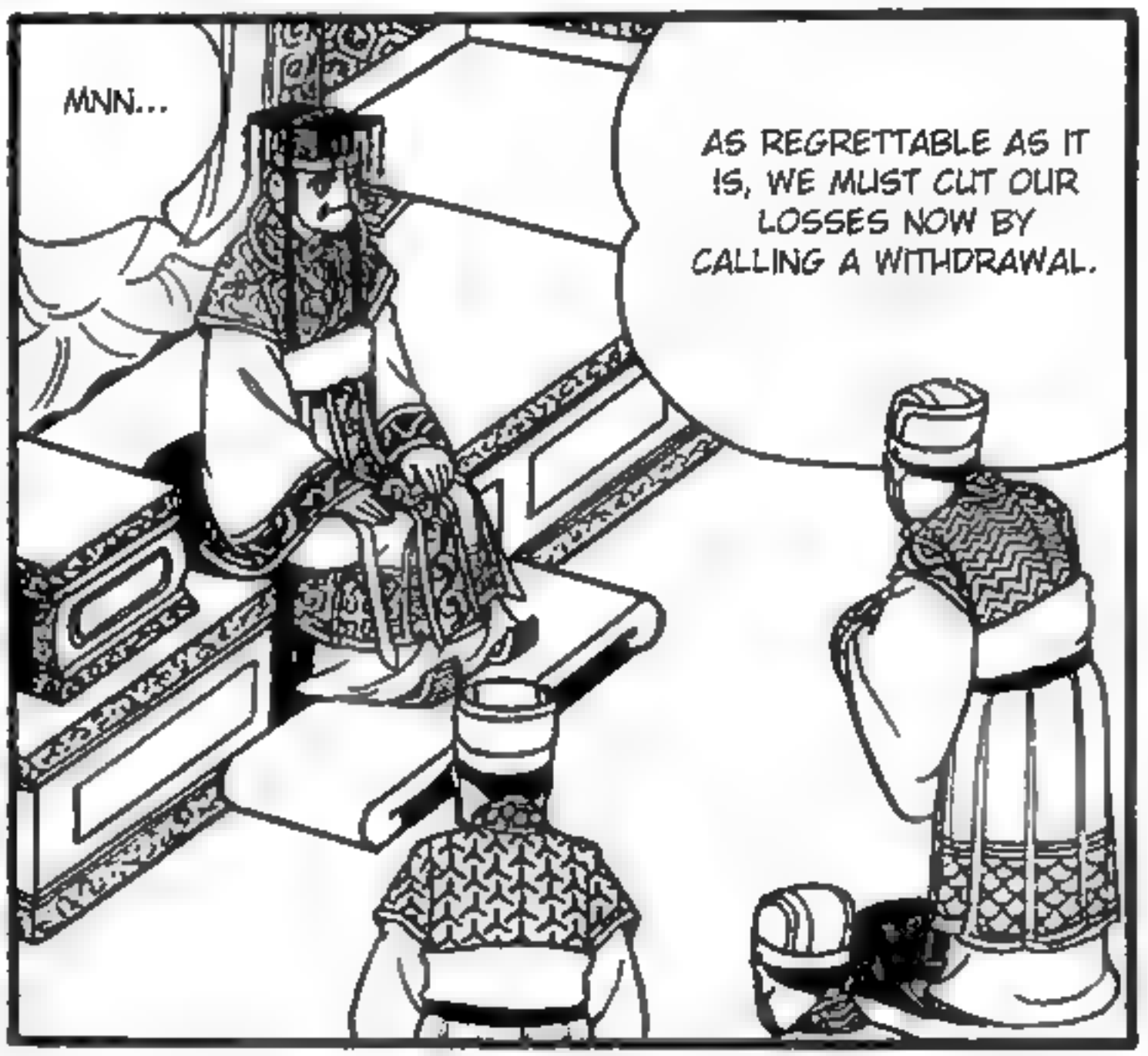
WITHOUT HAVING TAKEN HANZHONG?

PERHAPS AN EARLY WITHDRAWAL IS IN ORDER, YOUR IMPERIAL MAJESTY.

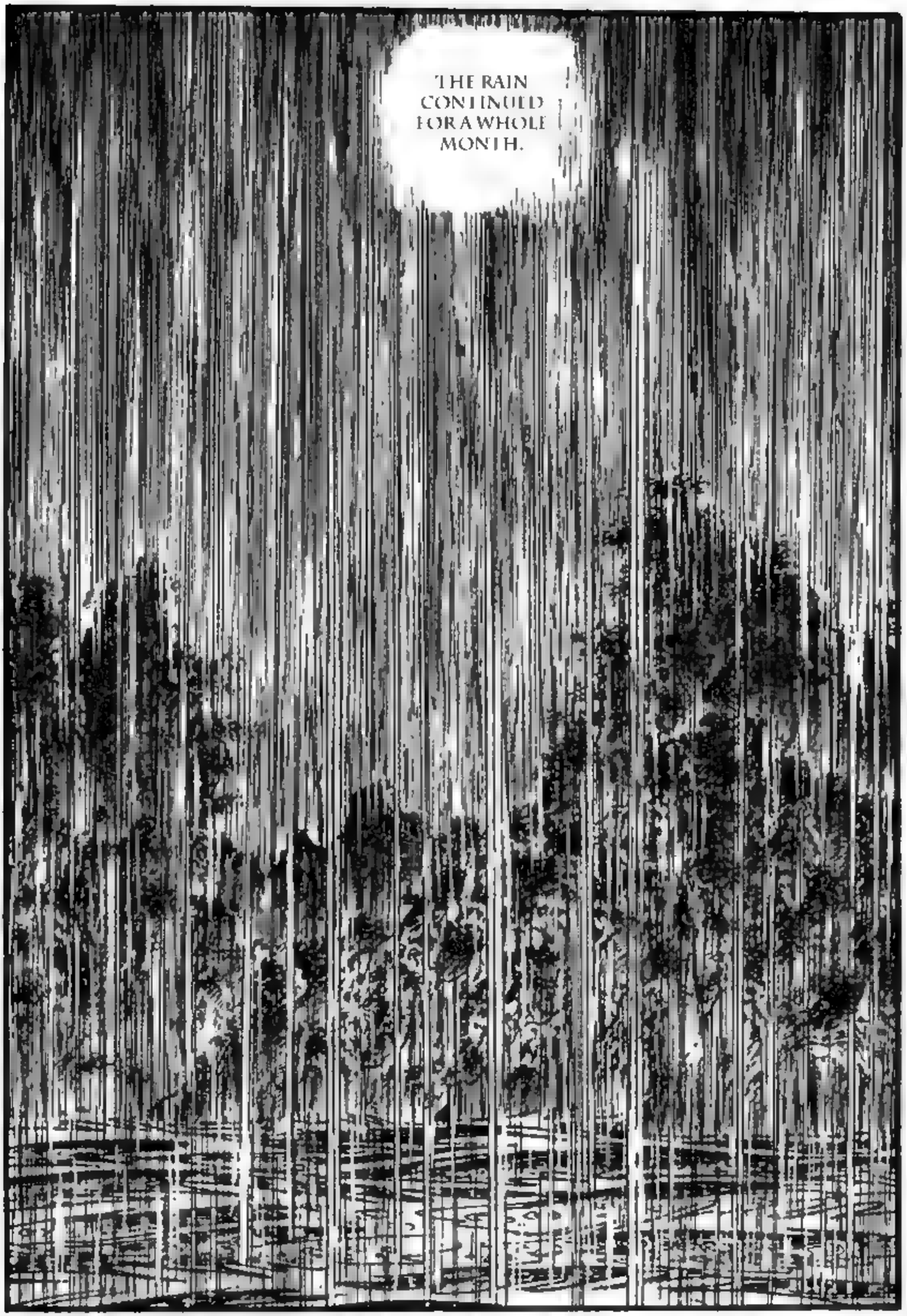
YES, EVEN IF THEY COULD ADVANCE TO HANZHONG, SICK AND STARVING MEN DO NOT MAKE GOOD SOLDIERS.


IF THIS SITUATION CONTINUES, MORALE WILL HIT ROCK BOTTOM AND THE ARMY WILL BE WRACKED BY DESERTERS.

YES, YOU MEN ARE EXACTLY RIGHT.


MNN...
AS REGRETTABLE AS IT IS, WE MUST CUT OUR LOSSES NOW BY CALLING A WITHDRAWAL.

YES, YOUR MAJESTY.
SEND THE WITHDRAWAL ORDER.


THE RAIN
CONTINUED
FOR A WHOLE
MONTH.

BUT AT LAST, THE SKIES BEGAN TO CLEAR UP
A MESSENGER FROM LUOYANG ARRIVED JUST THEN

NO, THE EMPEROR SHOULD BLAME MY SHORTCOMINGS THAN BLAME THE HEAVENS.

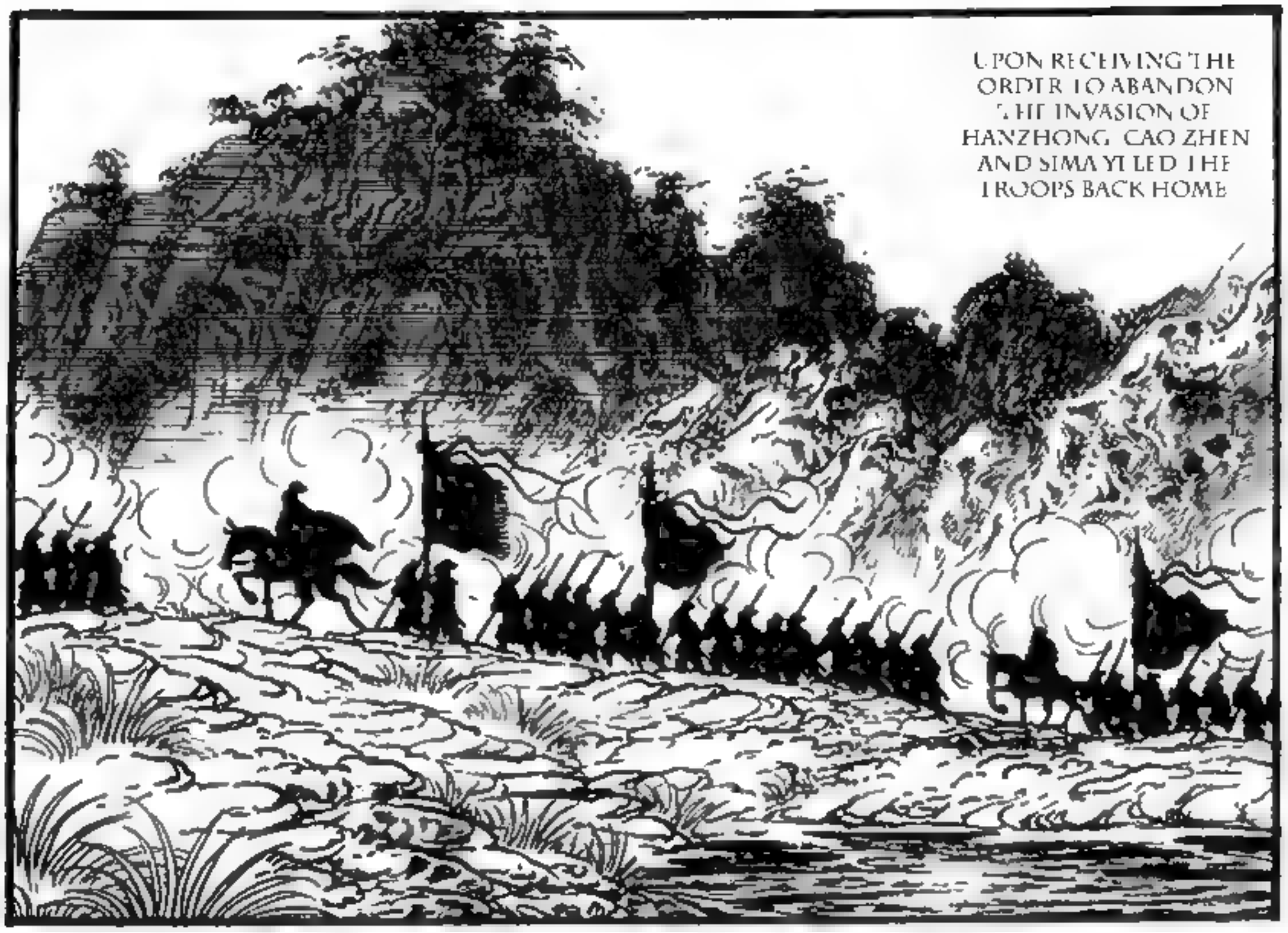
THE EMPEROR'S HEART GOES OUT TO COMMANDER CAO ZHEN FOR DEALING WITH THE WRETCHED WEATHER.

UNDER-STOOD

IN LIGHT OF THE HEAVY RAINFALL, THE EMPEROR COMMANDS YOU TO WITHDRAW YOUR ARMY BACK TO THE CAPITAL AND REORGANIZE.

I KNOW IT MUST BE VERY HARD FOR SIR TO WITHDRAW WITHOUT HAVING ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING.

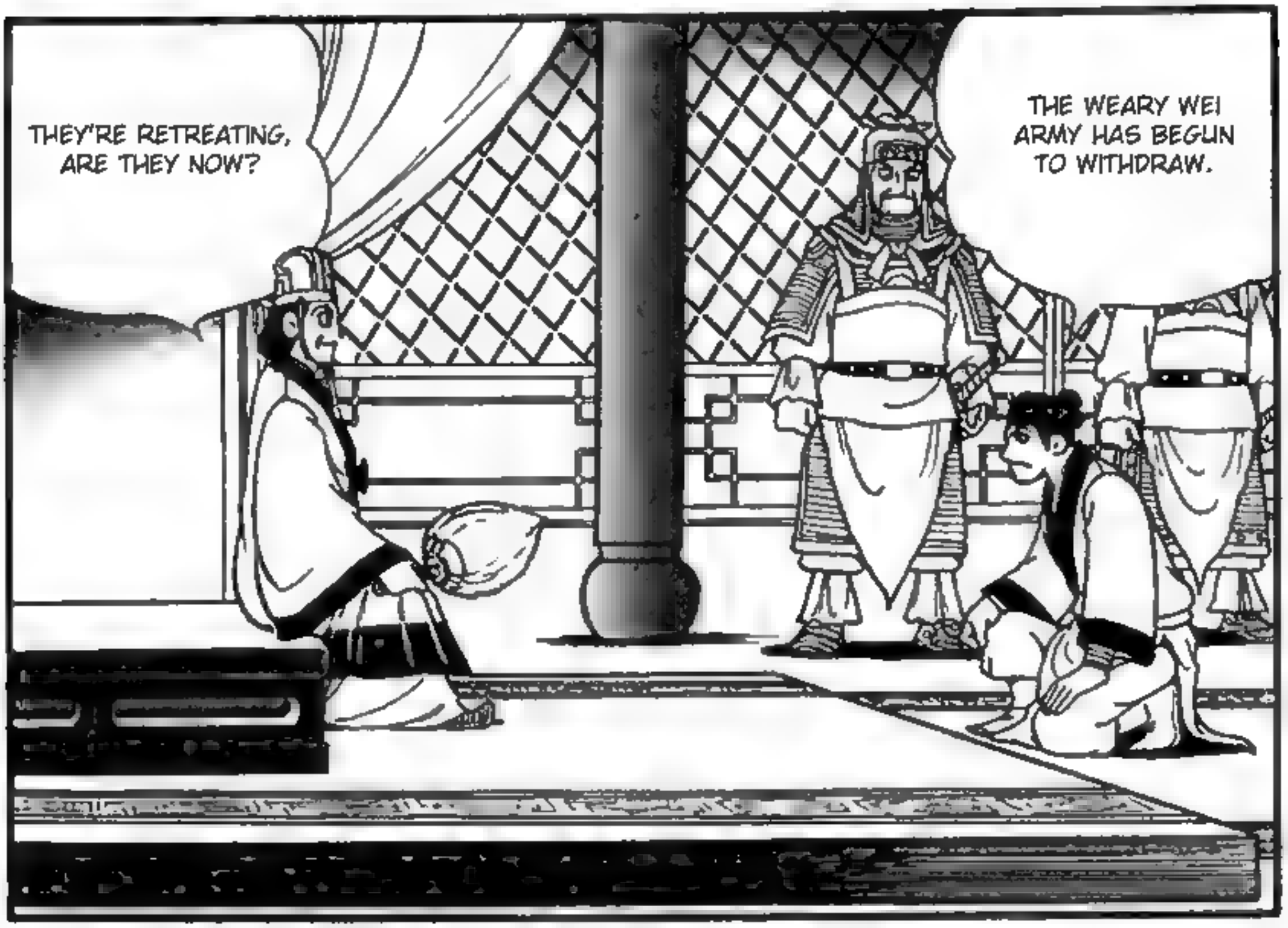
I WILL SEE TO IT THAT NO FURTHER HARM COMES TO HIS MAJESTY'S TROOPS.


UPON RECEIVING THE ORDER TO ABANDON THE INVASION OF HANZHONG, CAO ZHEN AND SIMA YI LED THE TROOPS BACK HOME

TO PROTECT THE ARMY FROM A SHU PURSUIT, NUMEROUS UNITS WERE LEFT HIDDEN IN KEY AREAS TO SECURE A SAFE RETREAT

WAGER

HANZHONG


THEY'RE RETREATING, ARE THEY NOW?
THE WEARY WEI ARMY HAS BEGUN TO WITHDRAW.

THEY MUSTN'T? DID I HEAR THAT CORRECTLY, SIR?

GO TELL WANG PING AND ZHANG NI THAT THEY MUST NOT PURSUE THE ENEMIES.

ORDINARLY, YES, BUT AS SIMA YI IS LEADING THAT ARMY, HE IS BOUND TO HAVE HIDDEN MANY TROOPS IN KEY PASSES TO SECURE A SAFE RETREAT. ORDERING A PURSUIT IS TO MARCH OUR TROOPS INTO THEIR TRAPS.

ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS, CHANCELLOR? WOULDN'T A TIRED, DEMORALIZED ARMY RETREATING BACK HOME IN FAILURE BE THE PERFECT TARGET TO PURSUE?

FEW?

HOW CAN WE OBTAIN A GREAT VICTORY IF WE FEAR A FEW HIDDEN TROOPS?

WE WILL BE THE LOSERS IN SUCH A SCENARIO.

MOREOVER, AS THEY ARE WITHDRAWING WITHOUT HAVING ACCOMPLISHED ANYTHING, IF WE NEEDLESSLY TRY TO PURSUE THEM, THEY WILL NOT HESITATE TO STOP THEIR RETREAT AND FOCUS ON ELIMINATING OUR PURSUIT FORCES IN AN ATTEMPT TO SALVAGE THEIR PRIDE.

THE WEI ARMY THAT WAS MOBILIZED FOR THIS CAMPAIGN IS 400,000. EVEN IF THE RECENT RAINFALL CAUSED TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CASUALTIES, THEY STILL HAVE WELL OVER 300,000 COMBAT-EFFECTIVE TROOPS. SIMA YI WILL HAVE PLACED MORE THAN JUST A "FEW HIDDEN TROOPS" TO DETER US FROM PURSUING.

QISHAN!?

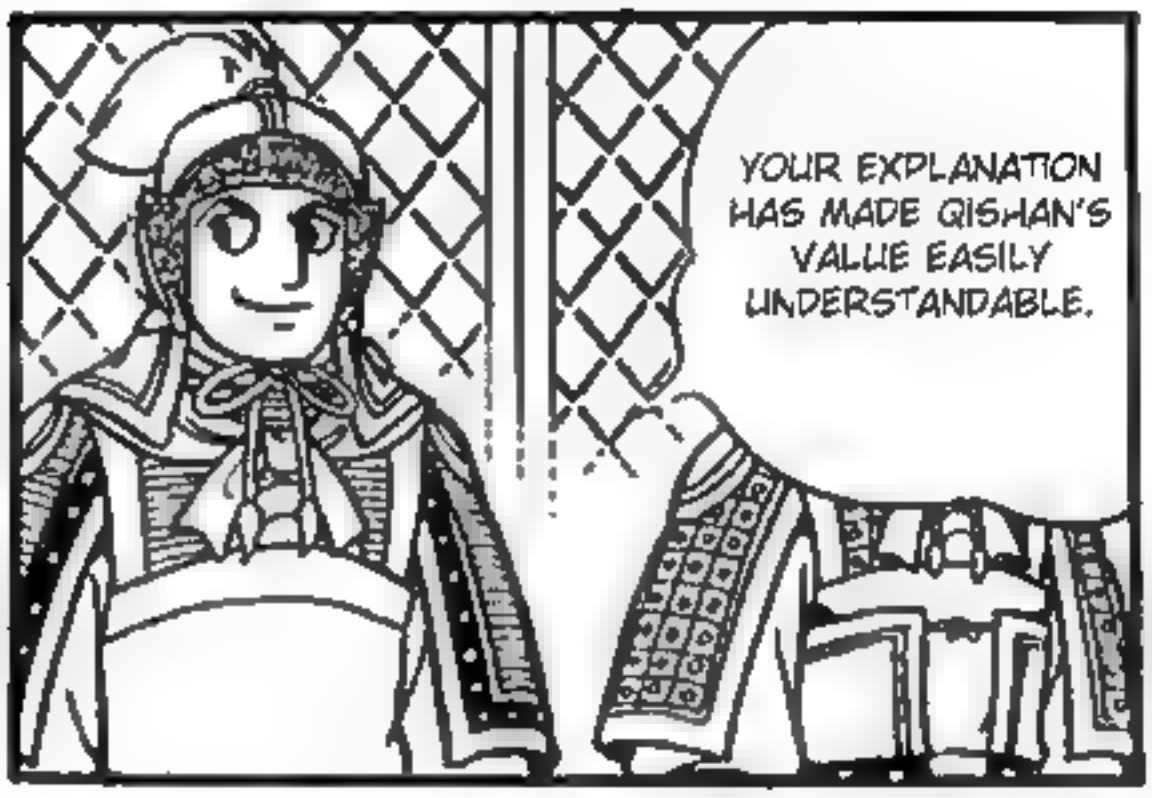
IT IS BETTER TO INSTEAD PRIORITIZE THE CAPTURE OF QISHAN BY ADVANCING THROUGH THE XIE AND JI GORGES WHILE THE BULK OF THE WEI FORCES ARE AWAY.

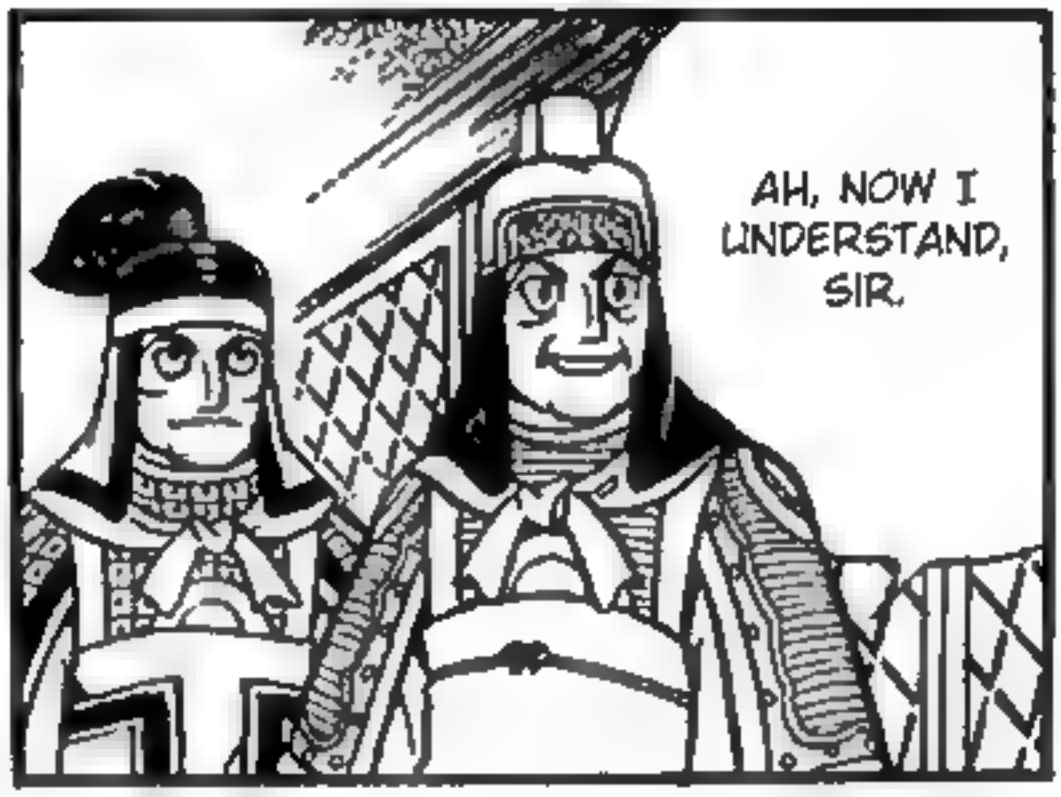
QISHAN IS THE VITAL ROAD TO CHANG'AN.

PARDON ME FOR ASKING, CHANCELLOR, BUT WHY MUST WE FIXATE ON QISHAN SO STRONGLY? THERE ARE OTHER WAYS OF CAPTURING CHANG'AN, IS THERE NOT?

RESTING ON THE WEI RIVER AT THE FRONT WHILE BACKED BY THE XIE GORGE, THE RIVERS AND HILLS JOIN TOGETHER TO FORM A NATURAL BARRIER. IT IS A HIGHLY DEFENSIBLE AREA THAT WILL GIVE OUR ARMIES THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT. THAT IS WHY WE MUST SECURE QISHAN BEFORE MOVING IN ON CHANG'AN.

IT IS THE NEXUS OF THE LONGXI COMMANDERIES AND LUOYANG, GIVING IT GREAT STRATEGIC VALUE.


YOUR EXPLANATION HAS MADE QISHAN'S VALUE EASILY UNDERSTANDABLE.


AH, NOW I UNDERSTAND, SIR.

SHU FORCES SPLIT INTO TWO TO HEAD THROUGH XIE AND JI GORGES TO REACH QISHAN.

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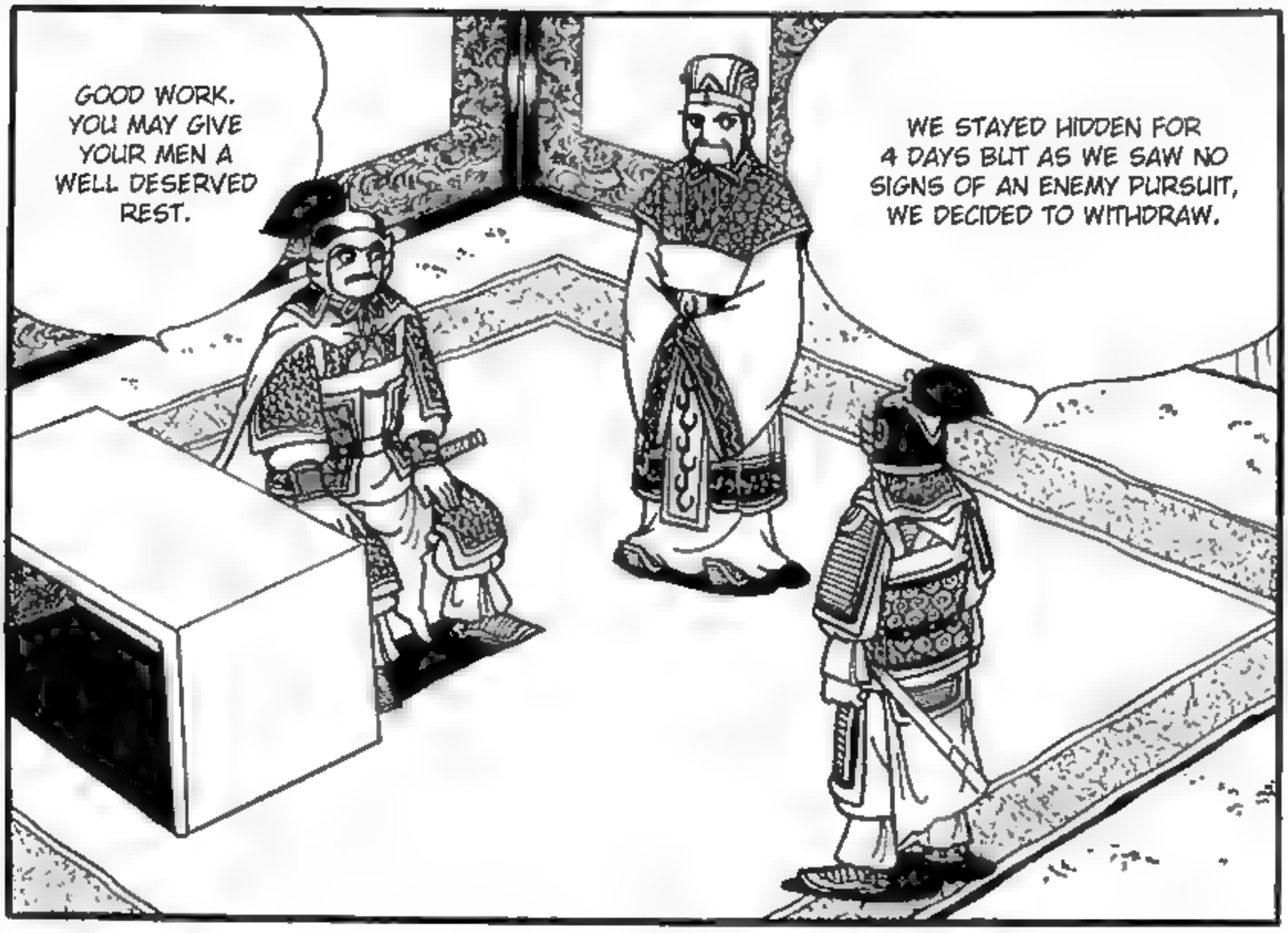

GOOD WORK. YOU MAY GIVE YOUR MEN A WELL DESERVED REST.
WE STAYED HIDDEN FOR 4 DAYS BUT AS WE SAW NO SIGNS OF AN ENEMY PURSUIT, WE DECIDED TO WITHDRAW.

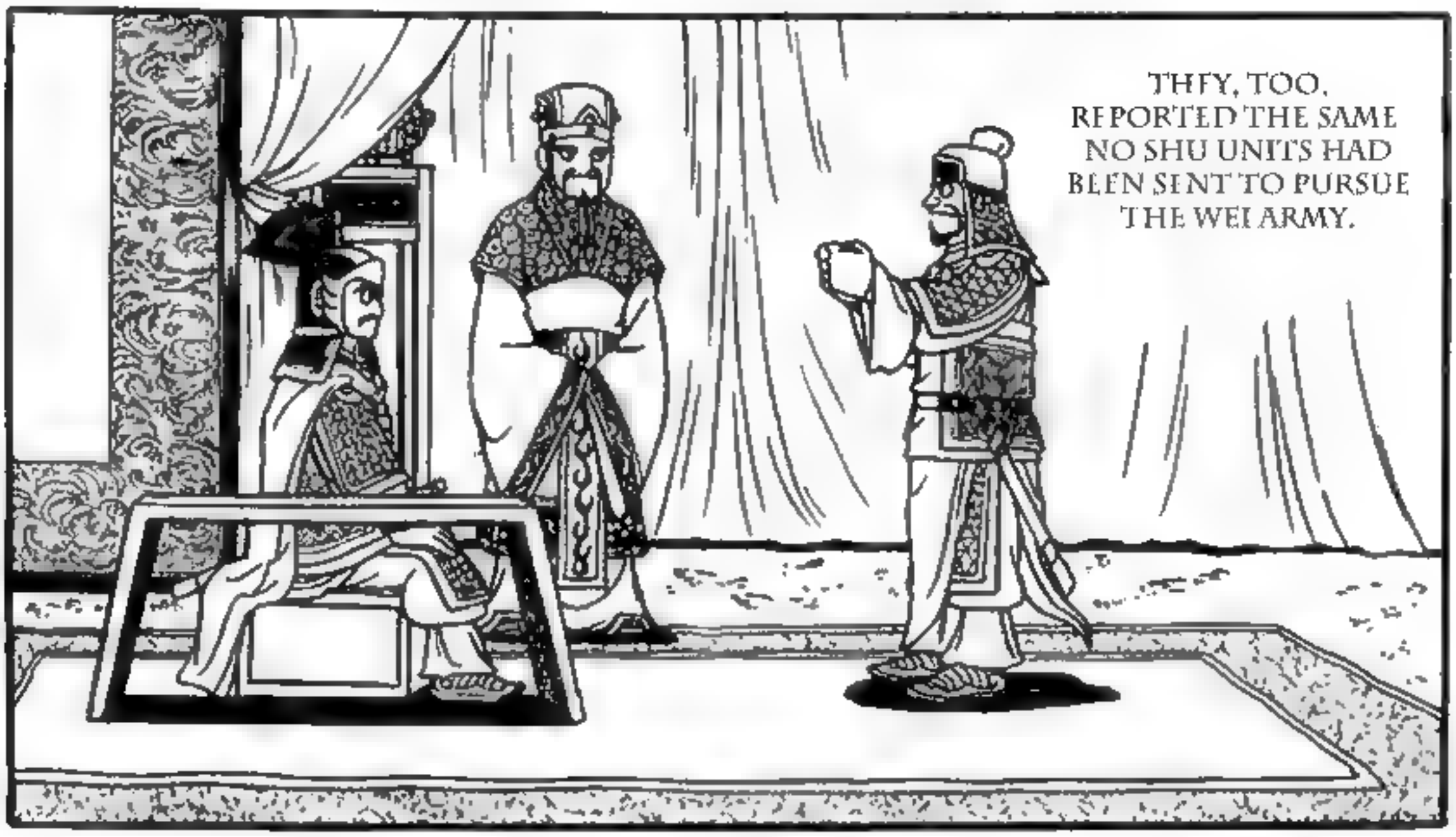
ZHUGE LIANG IS BEING VERY CAUTIOUS AS HE IS UNCERTAIN HOW MANY HIDDEN TROOPS WE LEFT BEHIND.

WHY DO YOU THINK THE ENEMIES HAVEN'T PURSUED US, SIMA YI?

RIGHT.

LET US WAIT HERE TO SEE IF THE OTHER HIDDEN UNITS SUCCESS-FULLY WITHDRAW AS WELL.

ONE BY ONE, THE OTHER UNITS RETURNED


THEY, TOO, REPORTED THE SAME NO SHU UNITS HAD BEEN SENT TO PURSUE THE WEI ARMY.

YES, VERY ODD INDEED... PURSUING AN ENEMY IN RETREAT IS THE EASIEST KIND OF BATTLE, AFTER ALL...

DON'T YOU THINK IT'S A LITTLE STRANGE THAT THE ENEMIES DIDN'T EVEN SEND OUT SCOUTS AFTER US?

HMM...

I DOUBT IT. THEY WOULD HAVE SENT THEIR TROOPS BY MORE THAN JUST ONE ROAD...

DO YOU THINK THEY TOO, HAVE HAD DIFFICULTIES IN CROSSING TERRAIN DUE TO THE RECENT HEAVY RAINFALL? PERHAPS A BROKEN BRIDGE OR SOME OTHER FACTOR?

PERHAPS ZHUGE LIANG WAS MORE AFRAID OF OUR HIDDEN TROOPS THAN WE THOUGHT.

NO, ZHUGE LIANG IS NEITHER THAT MEEK NOR COWARDLY.

SO YOU THINK HE JUST TWIDDLED HIS THUMBS AND LET US MAKE A CLEAN GETAWAY JUST BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID?

AGHH!

THEN HE MUST BE PLANNING SOMETHING...

WHAT!? QISHAN!?

SIR, I GOT IT! ZHUGE LIANG AIMS TO TAKE QISHAN WHILE WE ARE HERE.

NO, I'M QUITE CERTAIN, SIR!

HAHAHA! THAT COULDN'T BE...

SO IF IT WASN'T PROBLEMS WITH POOR TERRAIN OR LACK OF TROOPS THAT CAUSED HIM TO NOT SEND A SINGLE PURSUIT FORCE, WHAT ELSE COULD THE REASON BE!?

WHEN OUR ARMY WAS MARCHING TOWARDS HANZHONG, HIS SCOUTS PROBABLY INFORMED HIM OF OUR ADVANCE AND HE APPROPRIATELY GATHERED THE TROOPS AT HANZHONG TO FIGHT US OFF.

HMM, I STILL FIND IT HARD TO BELIEVE...

THERE IS NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT! HE WILL TRY TO STEAL QISHAN FROM UNDERNEATH OUR NOSES!

OH?

IF NO ENEMIES COME BY EITHER OF THE TWO GORGES FOR 10 DAYS, THEN I WILL ACCEPT WHATEVER PUNISHMENT.

THEN HOW ABOUT THIS, SIR? LET US SPLIT OUR FORCES INTO TWO AND MAKE A RAPID MARCH TO XIE AND JI GORGES JUST IN CASE.

HOW ABOUT I PUT ON MAKEUP AND WOMAN'S CLOTHES? AND I WILL KOWTOW TO YOU AS WELL!

WHAT KIND OF PUNISHMENT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HERE?

HAHAHA! NOW THAT'S ONE HELL OF A WAGER!

A MAN OF YOUR STATURE WILL DRESS AS A WOMAN AND KOWTOW TO ME?

YOU MEAN IF I WERE TO LOSE THE BET?

NOW WHAT WILL YOU DO, SIR, IF I WERE TO WIN THE BET?

HMM... LET ME THINK...

WELL, A WAGER IS ONLY INTERESTING IF THERE IS A PUNISHMENT AND REWARD FOR BOTH SIDES.

I ACCEPT YOUR OFFER THEN, SIR.
IF YOU WIN, I WILL GIVE YOU THE JADE GIRDLE AND WAR HORSE THE EMPEROR PERSONALLY GAVE TO ME.

HAVING MADE THE WAGER, SIMA YI HURRIED TO THE JI GORGE.

WHILE CAO ZHEN MADE HIS WAY TO THE XIE GORGE

JI
GORGE

ピシャ

THERE'S BOUND TO BE MOSQUI-TOS AFTER SO MUCH RAIN...
JUST LOOK AT ALL THESE BITES!
I HEARD THAT THE COMMANDER AND VICE-COMMANDER MOVED US ALL THE WAY OUT HERE INSTEAD OF GOING BACK HOME OUT OF A PERSONAL WAGER!
TELL ME ABOUT IT. I'M FREAKIN' EXHAUSTED.
JUST WHAT THE HELL ARE WE DOING HERE ANYWAYS? WE DON'T EVEN KNOW IF THE ENEMIES WILL SHOW UP HERE BUT THE OFFICERS KEEP YE..ING AT US TO NOT LIGHT ANY FIRES AND STAY ON OUR GUARD ALL THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT.
HM?

Y-YES, SIR...

YOU THERE! COME!

N-NO, I DIDN'T MEAN THAT-
SO YOU THINK I'VE DRAGGED THE TROOPS OUT HERE FOR A PERSONAL WAGER, DO YOU?

.....

SILENCE! I HEARD YOUR ENTIRE UNIT COMPLAINING FROM THE VERY BEGINNING!

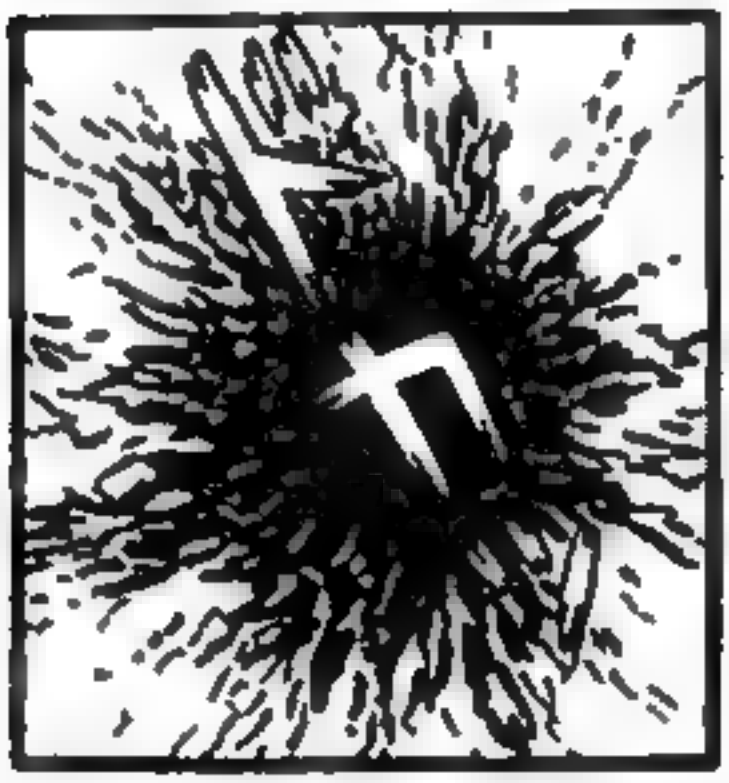
IF THE ENEMIES DO ARRIVE HERE, THEN WE WILL BEAT THEM BACK AND THEN WITHDRAW TO LUOYANG TRIUMPHANTLY, WHERE THE EMPEROR WILL REWARD HIS VICTORIOUS TROOPS.

THE WAGER WAS ONLY MADE TO CONVINCE THE COMMANDER TO DEFEND THE TWO GORGES JUST IN CASE! DO NOT FORGET OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO STOP THE SHU ARMY AT ALL COSTS!

A MERE FOOTSOLDIER LIKE YOU HAS NO PLACE TO CRITICIZE THE ACTIONS OF THE COMMANDER AND MYSELF! BUT WHAT'S TRULY OUTRAGEOUS IS THAT YOU DARE TO HARM THE ARMY'S MORALE WITH YOUR INCESSANT GRUMBLING AND WILD ACCUSATIONS EVEN AS THE RECENT RAINFALL HAS ALREADY LOWERED MORALE! YOUR CRIMES ARE UNFORGIVABLE!

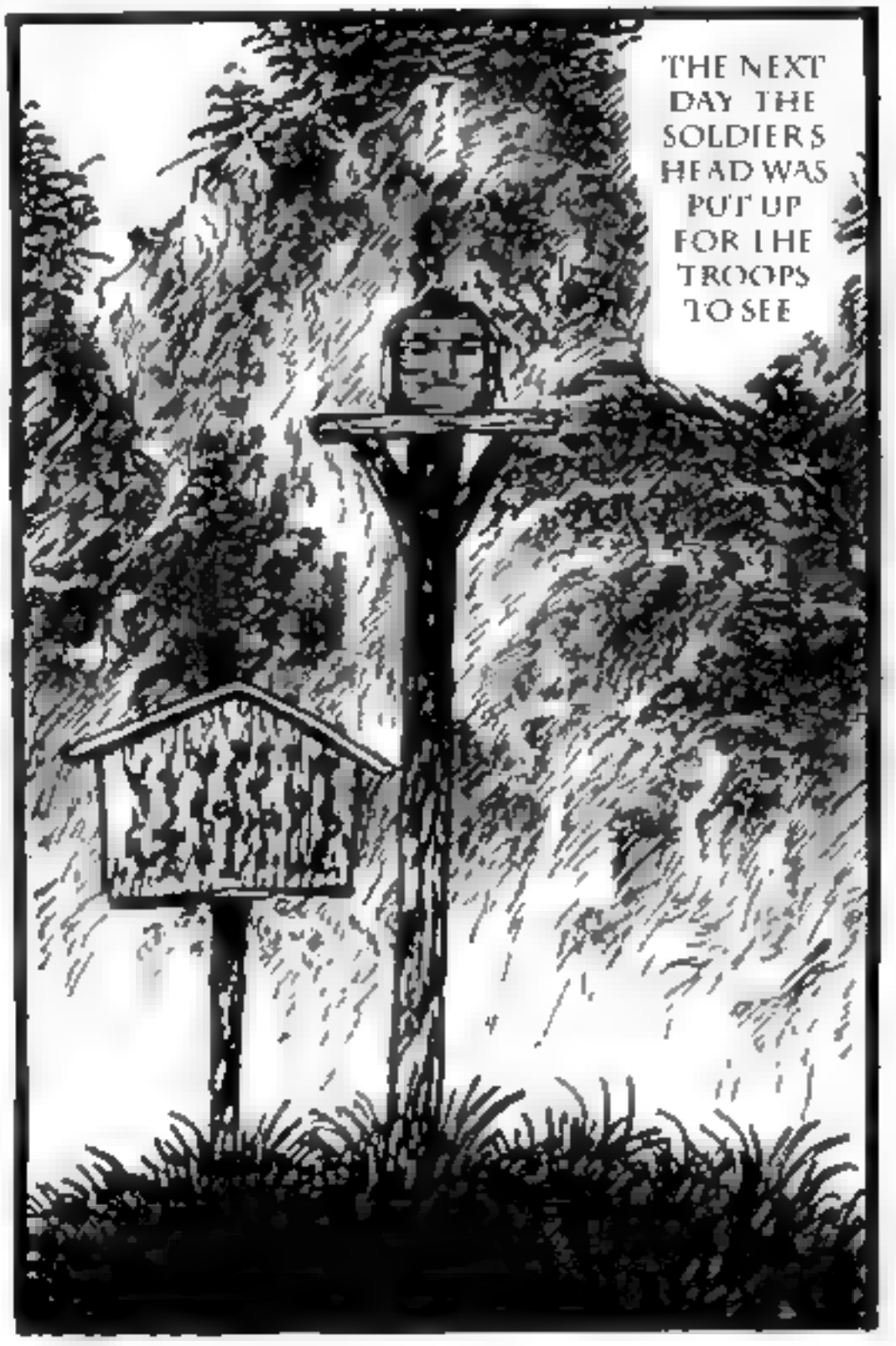
AGHH!

MAKE AN EXAMPLE OUT OF THIS MAN'S HEAD!



N-NO, PLEASE SPARE ME!

SOLDIERS WHO HAD ALSO HARBOURED SIMILAR COMPLAINTS WERE SHOCKED AND SCARED BY THIS INCIDENT.


THE NEXT DAY THE SOLDIERS HEAD WAS PUT UP FOR THE TROOPS TO SEE

SPURRING THEM
TO WORK EXTRA
HARD IN THEIR
GUARD DUTIES

THUS, SIMA YI
MANAGED TO
MAINTAIN
DISCIPLINE AS HIS
TROOPS AWAITED
THE SHU FORCES

IT WAS DURING THEN THE SHU GENERALS WEI YAN, ZHANG NI CHEN SHI AND DU QIONG MARCHED INTO THE JI GORGE WITH 20 000 TROOPS

GENERAL WEI YAN!

THE CHANCEL-LOR HAS SENT ME HERE.

GREETINGS, DENG ZHI.

HAHAHA. I SEE THE CHANCELLOR'S EXTREME-CAUTIOUSNESS IS ACTING UP AGAIN.

STOP OUR ADVANCE!?

HE ASKED ME TO WARN YOU GENERALS TO TEMPORARILY STOP YOUR ADVANCE TO SEE IF THERE ARE ANY HIDDEN ENEMY TROOPS.

THE CHANCELLOR'S PLANS ARE NEVER WRONG. I KINDLY ASK YOU TO FOLLOW THEM.

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS? THE WEI ARMY WAS JUST BOGGED DOWN BY A WHOLE MONTH OF HEAVY RAINFALL. THEIR RANKS ARE FULL OF SICK AND STARVING MEN, AND THEIR PRIORITY IS IN WITH-DRAWING BACK TO LUOYANG. WHY MUST WE SLOW DOWN OUR ADVANCE AND RISK LOSING A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY?

IF THE CHANCELLOR'S PLAN IS NEVER WRONG, THEN HOW DID WE LOSE JIETING TO SIMA YI!?

HAHAHA

HE STILL REMAINS FIXATED ON QISHAN AND ASKS HIS GENERALS TO CAPTURE QISHAN AGAIN, AND YET HERE YOU ARE, TELLING ME THAT I MUST SLOW DOWN MY ADVANCE AND RISK FAILING TO TAKE QISHAN. DO YOU NOT SEE THE INHERENT CONTRADICTION?

I'M AFRAID I MUST AGREE WITH MY COLLEAGUE CHEN SHI. IN THAT FIRST CAMPAIGN, I REMEMBER I ADVISED THE CHANCELLOR TO ADVANCE THROUGH ZIWU VALLEY AND IMMEDIATELY STORM IN ON CHANG'AN. HOWEVER, THE CHANCELLOR OPTED FOR A SLOW AND OVERLY-CAUTIOUS STRATEGY THAT ULTIMATELY LED TO OUR DEFEAT. HAD HE LISTENED TO ME THEN, WE WOULD HAVE CAPTURED CHANG'AN AND PERHAPS EVEN LUOYANG AS WELL BY NOW!

.....

I'M AFRAID I CANNOT HEED EVERY WISHY-WASHY ORDER. WE WILL MAKE A RAPID MARCH FOR QISHAN AND CAPTURE IT BEFORE ANYONE ELSE.

COME, MEN!

HAHA, I WOULD LOVE TO SEE THE LOOK ON THE CHANCELLOR'S FACE ONCE WE TAKE QISHAN!

SUCCESS IN BATTLE AT THE COST OF DISOBEDIENCE WAS ORDINARILY EXCUSED THUS SPURRED THE INDEPENDENT INITIATIVES OF WEI YAN AND CHEN SHI

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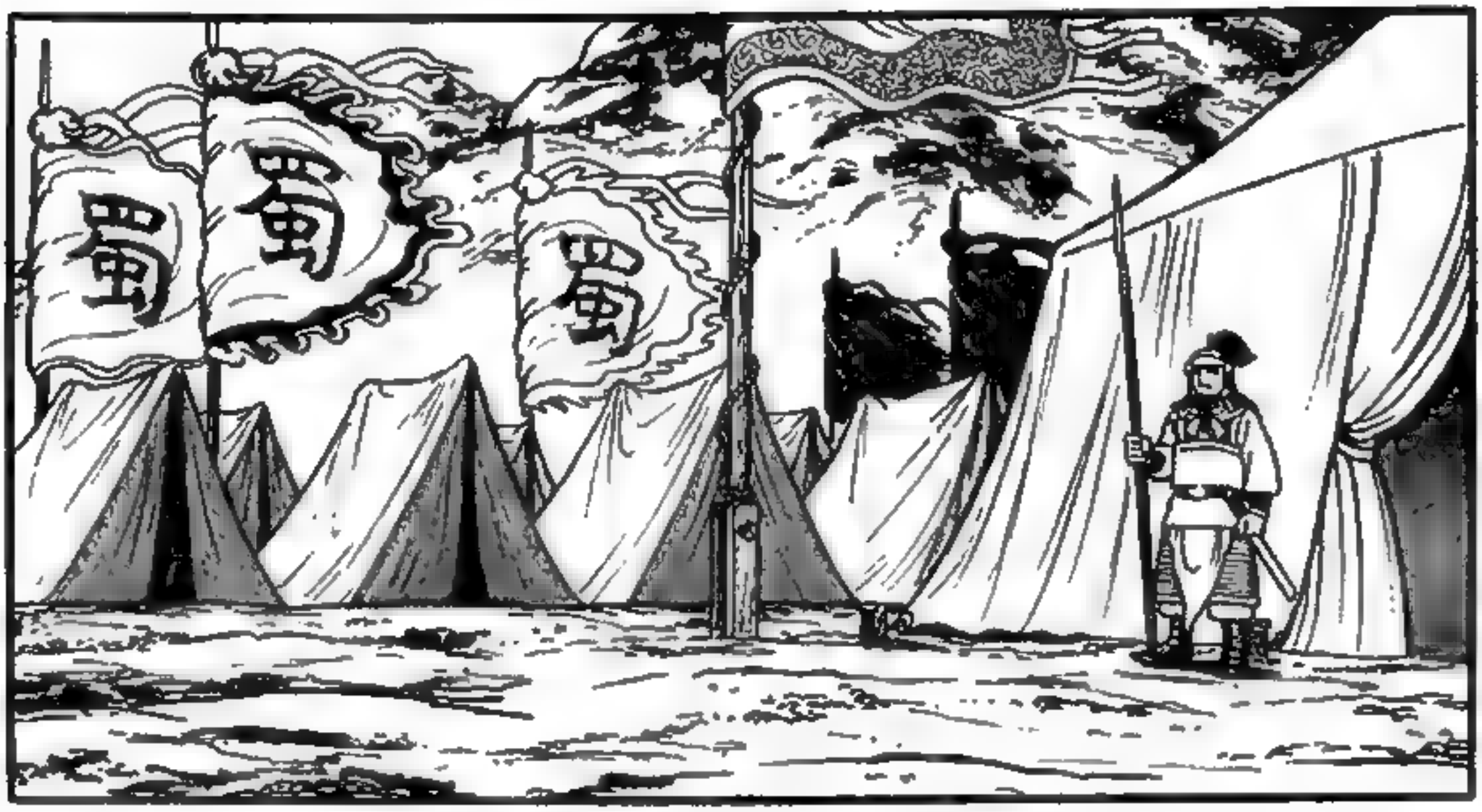
OH DEAR, I MUST INFORM THE CHANCEL-LOR AT ONCE...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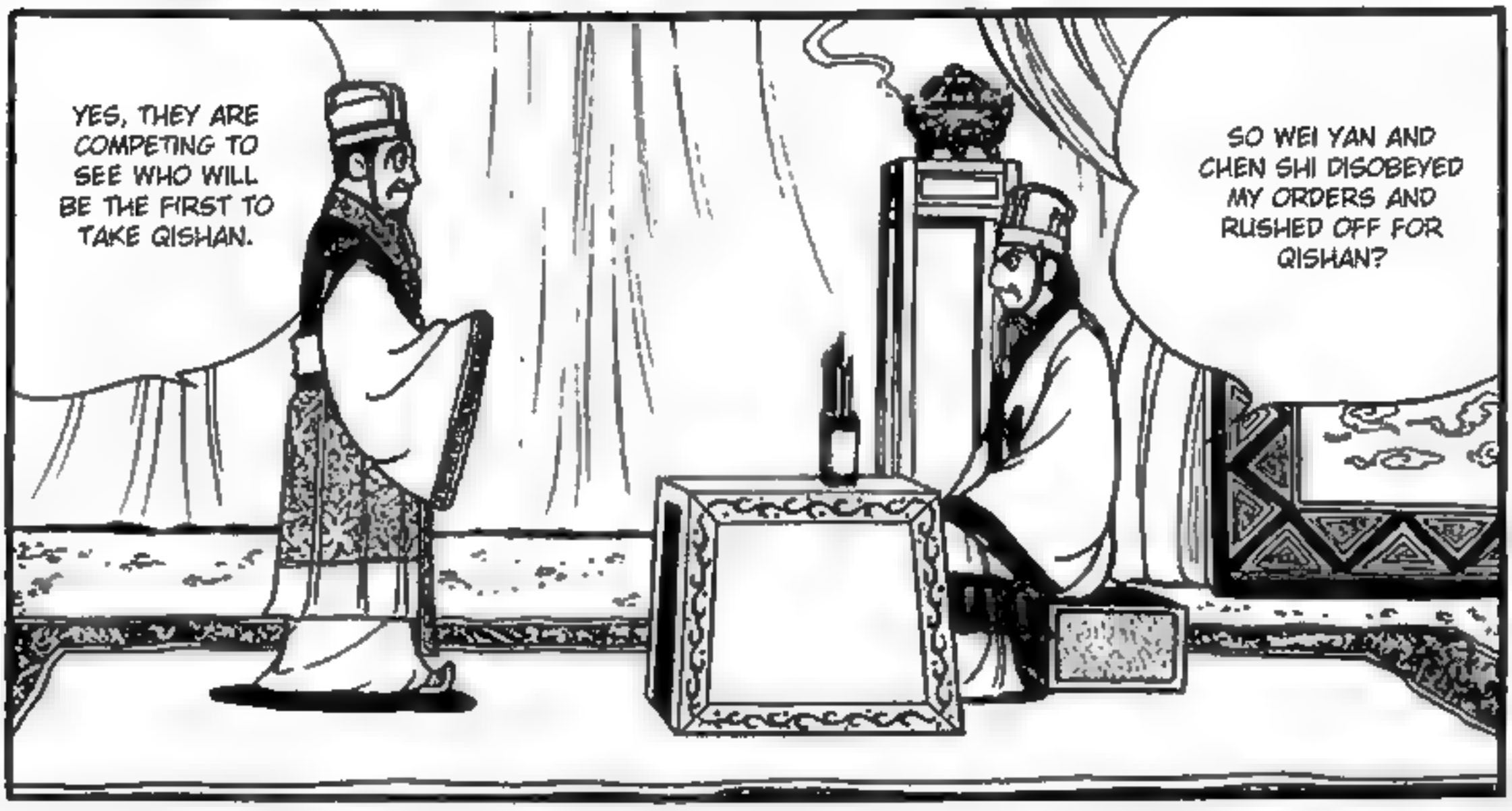
YES, THEY ARE COMPETING TO SEE WHO WILL BE THE FIRST TO TAKE QISHAN.
SO WEI YAN AND CHEN SHI DISOBEYED MY ORDERS AND RUSHED OFF FOR QISHAN?

EVEN SO, HOW CAN A COHERENT STRATEGY BE CARRIED OUT IF EACH OFFICER DISREGARDS ORDERS AND DOES WHAT HE THINKS IS BEST, AS THE CASE OF MA SU AT JIETING?
WEI YAN'S DISSATISFACTION WITH MY COMMAND MUST HAVE BEEN RISING DURING THE PAST SEVERAL CAMPAIGNS WHICH ALL ENDED INCONCLUSIVELY WITH US GIVING BACK THE TERRITORY WE TOOK...

WILL YOU SIMPLY ALLOW THE GENERALS TO CONTINUE THEIR RECKLESS ADVANCE?

INDEED... BUT THIS IS DUE TO MY SHORTCOMINGS AS A COMMANDER...

FORGIVE ME FOR NOT BEING MORE USEFUL, SIR...

IT'LL BE TOO LATE TO STOP THEM NOW IF THERE REALLY ARE HIDDEN WEI TROOPS. WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THERE ARE NO ENEMIES AT THE JI GORGE.

STILL, THIS DISOBEYANCE IS NOT SOMETHING I CAN OVERLOOK...

DISREGARDING KONGMING'S ADVICE, CHEN SHI HURRIED INTO THE JI GORGE WITH 5000 TROOPS.

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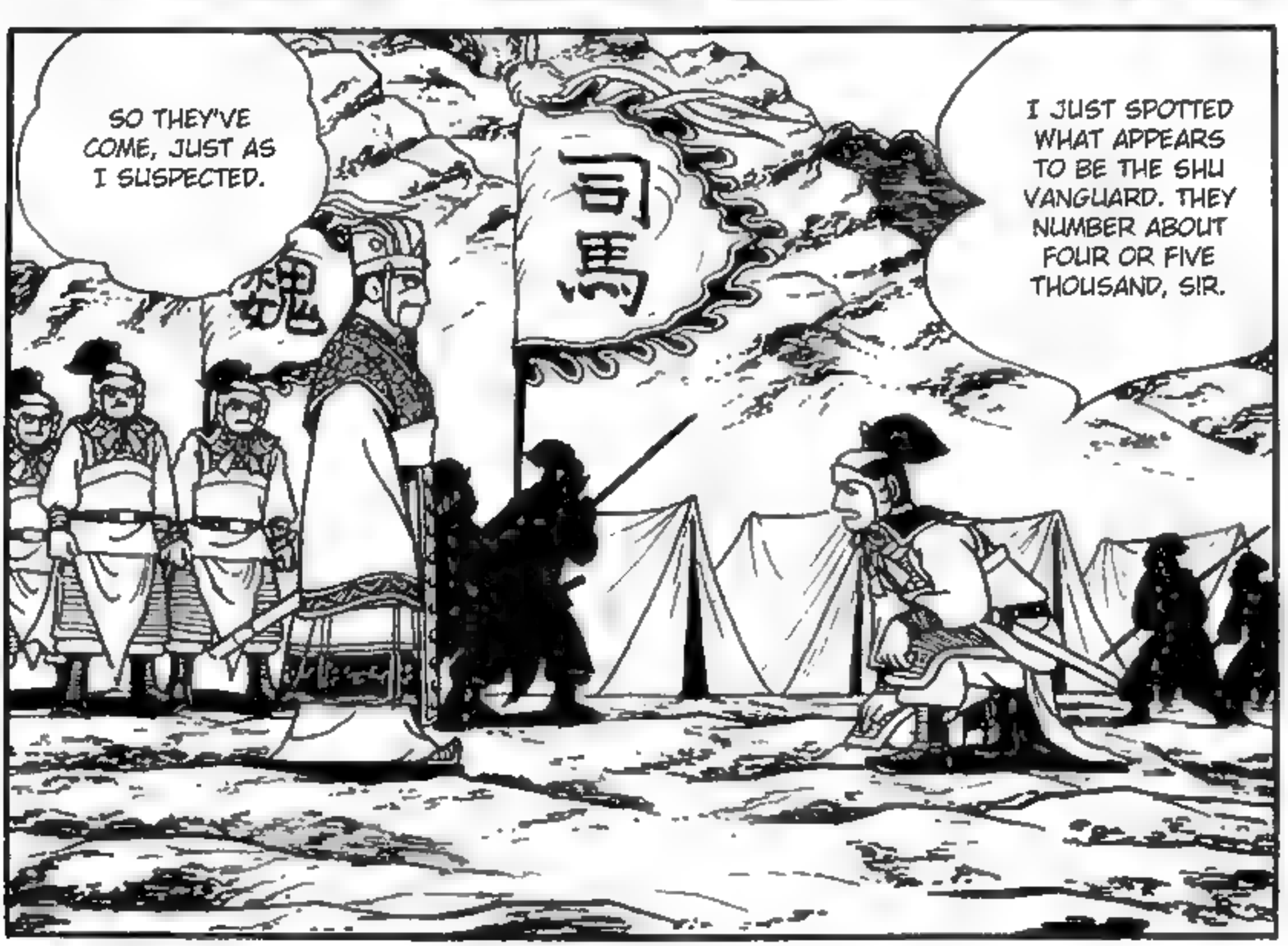
SIR!


SO THEY'VE COME, JUST AS I SUSPECTED.
I JUST SPOTTED WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE SHU VANGUARD. THEY NUMBER ABOUT FOUR OR FIVE THOUSAND, SIR.

THE ENEMY IS HERE! LIGHT THE SIGNAL!

YES, SIR.
SEND THE SIGNAL.

IT'S JUST AS VICE-COMMANDER SIMA YI PREDICTED.

OH?

GENERAL CHEN SHI! THERE'S A SMOKE SIGNAL!

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HM?

HMPH, THEY'RE NOTHING BUT WEAK COWARDS! LET'S TEACH THEM A LESSON!

ENEMY TROOPS!?

STAND FIRM AND FIGHT!

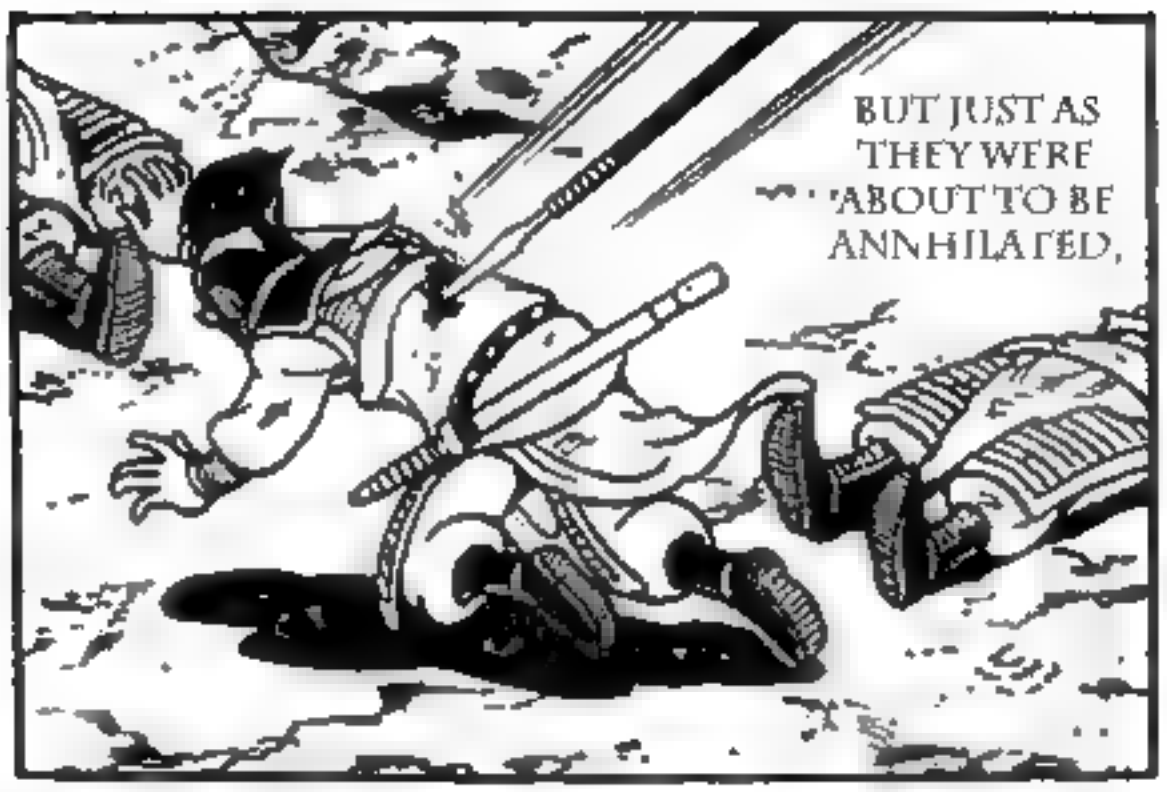
AHH! MORE ENEMIES TO OUR FLANK!

THERE ARE ENEMIES ATTACKING ON THIS SIDE TOO NOW!

CHEN SHI AND HIS TROOPS WERE NOW COMPLETELY SURROUNDED WITH NO ROOM TO RETREAT

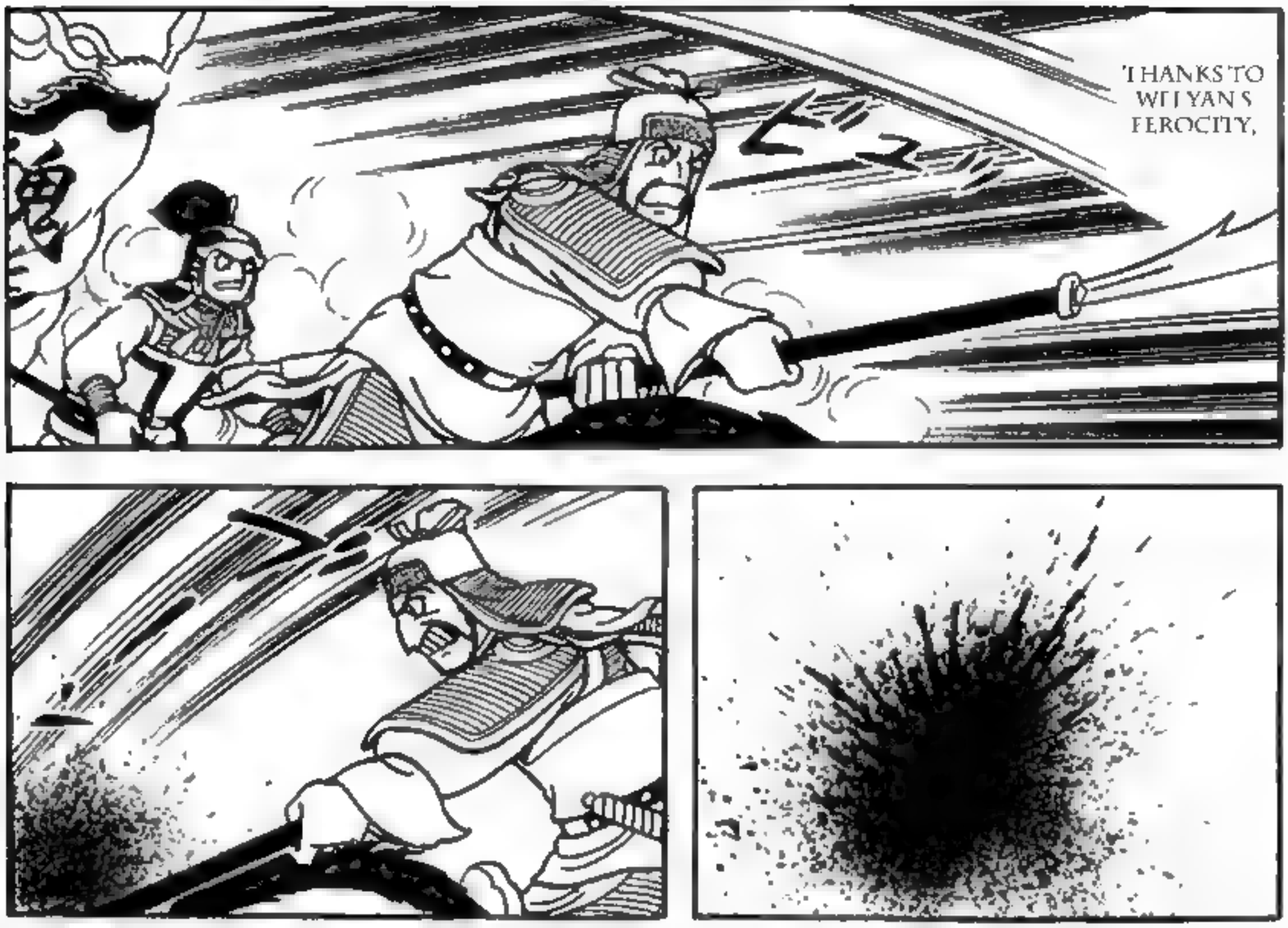
JUMPED AT THIS CHANCE TO EARN MERIT AND GLORY

THE WEI TROOPS, WHO PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT THEY WOULD RETREAT IN SHAME WITHOUT HAVING ACCOMPLISHED ANYTHING,

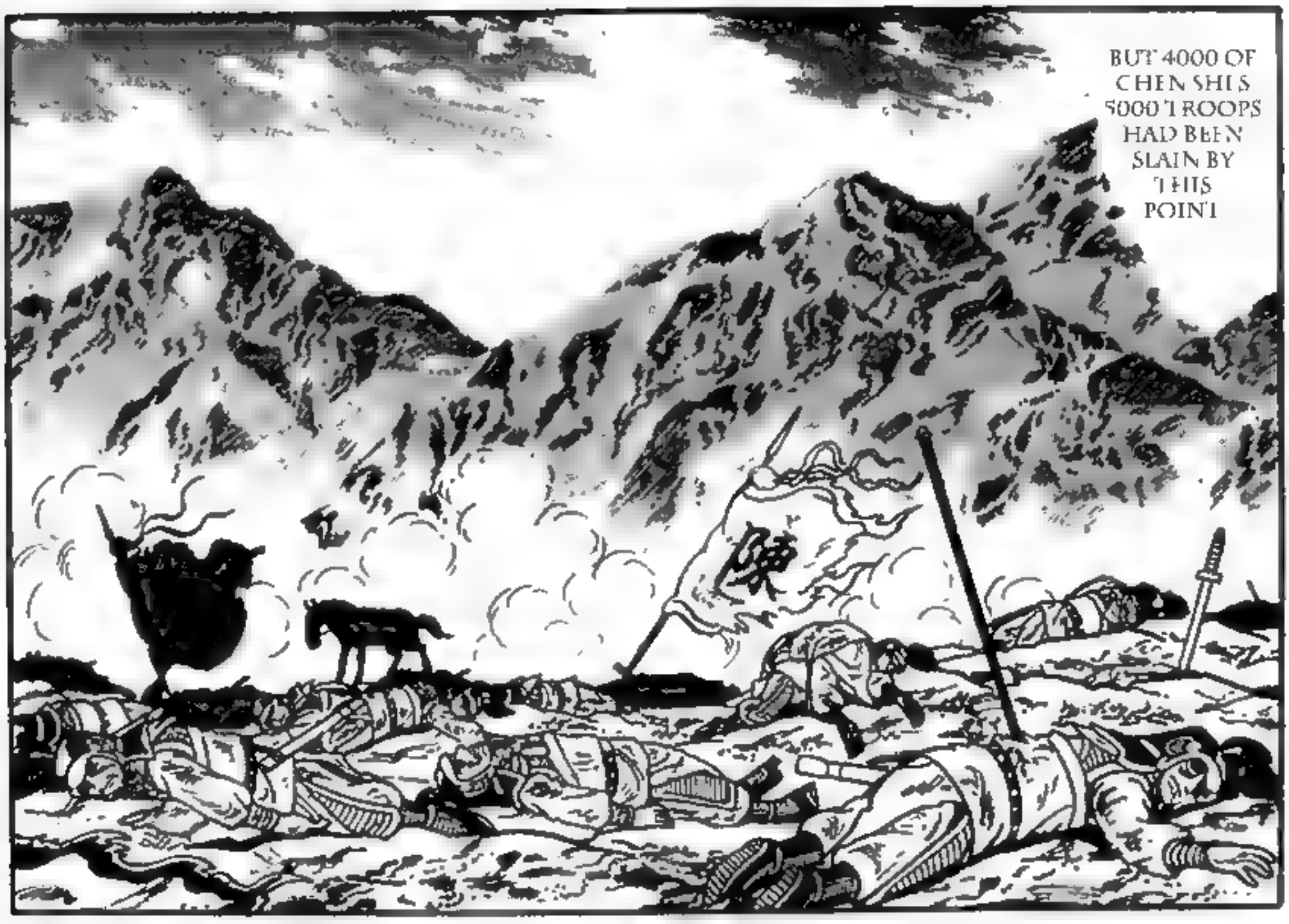

BUT JUST AS
THEY WERE
ABOUT TO BE
ANNHILATED,

CHEN SHI'S
TROOPS WERE
EASILY CUT
DOWN.

THE TROOPS
OF WEI YAN,
ZHANG NI, AND
DU QIONG
CAME TO SAVE
THEM
魏延


THANKS TO WEIYAN'S FEROCITY,

SIMA YI'S FORCES WERE DRIVEN OFF
司馬
司馬


BUT 4000 OF CHEN SHI'S 5000 TROOPS HAD BEEN SLAIN BY THIS POINT

WEI YAN AND CHEN SHI DEEPLY REGRETTED IGNORING KONGMING'S ADVICE BUT WHAT WAS DONE WAS ALREADY DONE

蜀 蜀 蜀

YES, AND CHEN SHI LOST 4000 OF HIS 5000 TROOPS FROM THE ENEMY AMBUSH.

SO THERE REALLY WERE HIDDEN ENEMIES AT THE JI GORGE!?

MN...

HIS TROOPS WOULD HAVE BEEN ENTIRELY ANNHILATED IF NOT FOR THE TIMELY ARRIVAL OF WEI YAN, ZHANG NI, AND DU QIONG.

I SEE...

AND WHAT IS THEIR STATUS NOW?

THEY HAVE STOPPED THEIR ADVANCE AND MADE CAMP.

YES, SIR.

CALL MA DAI AND WANG PING.

IF SIMA YI'S TROOPS ARE AT JI GORGE, THEN CAO ZHEN MUST BE AT THE XIE GORGE.

YES.

DID YOU SUMMON US, CHANCELLOR?

YES, SIR.

CAUTIOUSLY ADVANCE TO THE XIE GORGE AND IF YOU DO CONFIRM THAT CAO ZHEN IS THERE, MARCH ONLY AT NIGHT ACROSS THE HILLS TOWARDS QISHAN'S WESTERN SIDE. ONCE IN PLACE, SEND A SMOKE SIGNAL.

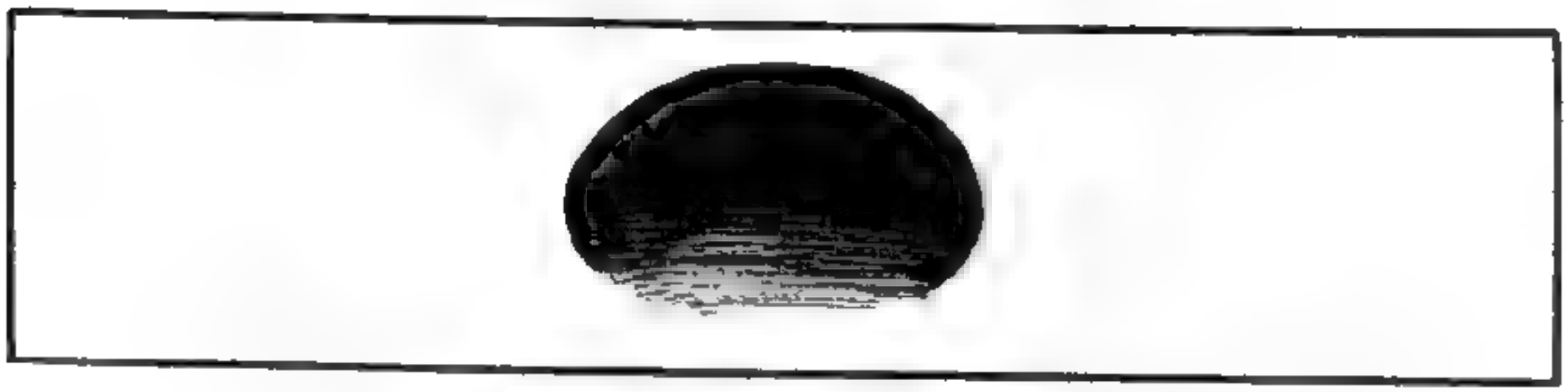
YES, SIR.
CALL MA ZHONG AND ZHANG YI.

MARCH BY NIGHT AND HIDE BY DAY ACROSS THE HILLS TO QISHAN'S RIGHT SIDE. YOU WILL LATER MEET UP WITH MA DAI AND WANG PING'S TROOPS TO MAKE A COMBINED ATTACK ON CAO ZHEN'S POSITION.
WHAT DO YOU REQUIRE FROM US, SIR?

UNDER-
STOOD.

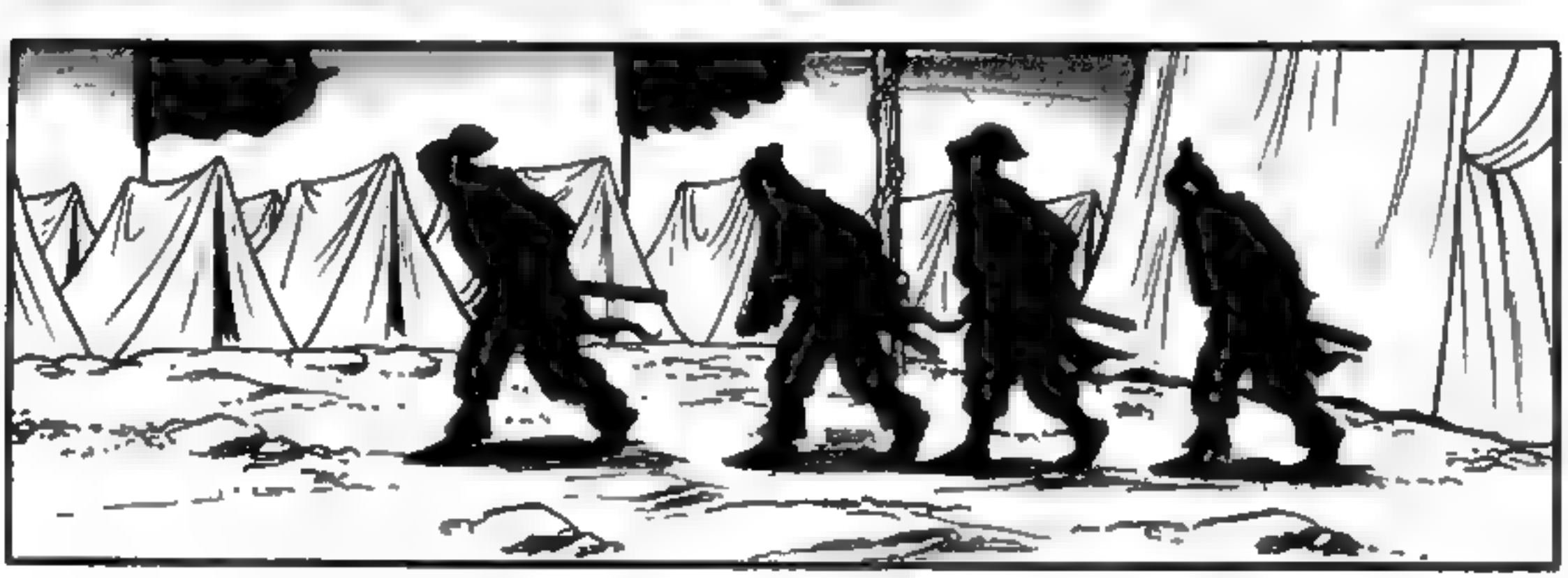
I WILL SEND ANOTHER FORCE TO ENGAGE CAO ZHEN'S TROOPS FROM THE FRONT WHILE YOU ATTACK HIS REAR AND FLANKS.

YES,
SIR.
NEXT,
SUMMON
GUAN XING,
LIAO HUA,
WU BAN, AND
WU YI.



COME CLOSER, MEN.

UNDER-STOOD, SIR.
I WANT YOU FOUR TO... WHISPER WHISPER



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AND STILL NO SIGN OF ENEMIES?

7 DAYS SIR.

HOW MANY DAYS HAS IT BEEN SINCE WE SET UP CAMP HERE?

NOT A SINGLE SHU SOLDIER.

I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE A MAN LIKE HIM IN WOMAN'S CLOTHES.

3 DAYS THEN... IF NO SHU TROOPS SHOW UP FOR JUST 3 MORE DAYS, SIMA YI WILL MAKE A MOST HUMILIATING PUBLIC GESTURE.

WHAT IS IT?

COMMANDER!

YES, SIR.

QIN LIANG! TAKE 5000 TROOPS TO MAKE A THOROUGH INVESTIGATION!

THE SCOUTS BELIEVE THEY MAY HAVE SPOTTED SOME SHU SOLDIERS.

WHAT!?

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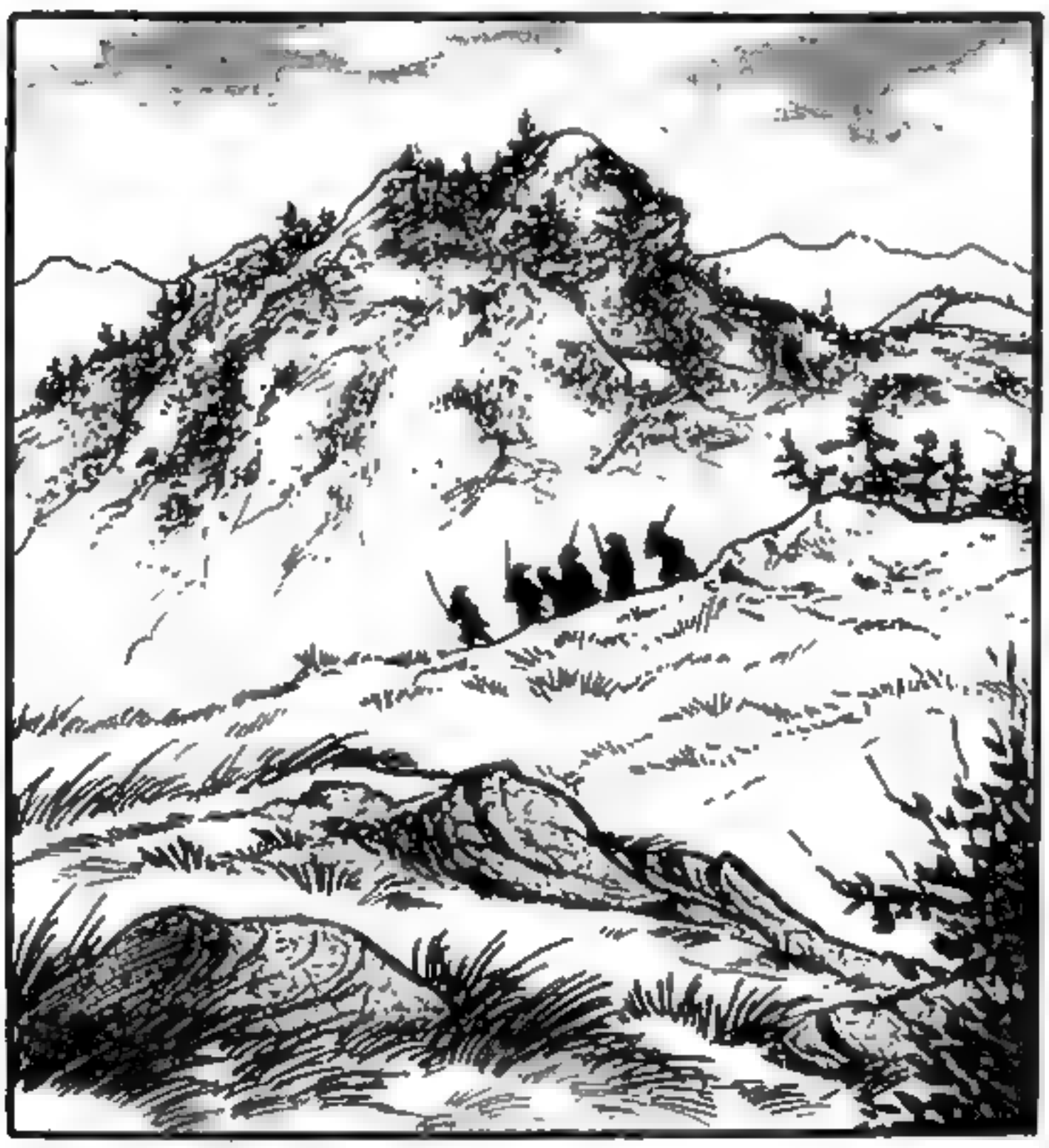


HM?

GENERAL, I THINK THAT'S THEM!

EITHER WAY, THEY'LL MAKE GOOD PRISONERS TO EXTRACT INFORMATION FROM! ARREST THEM NOW!

PERHAPS THEY'RE A SMALL UNIT SENT TO GATHER FIREWOOD.
DOESN'T SEEM TO BE VERY MANY.

RUN!
WE! TROOPS!
OH CRAP!
HALT RIGHT THERE AND I WILL AT LEAST SPARE YOUR LIVES!

WHO'S THERE?

WHAT?

THE SAME, BACK TO YOU!

LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS AND WE WILL NOT KILL YOU.

HIDDEN ENEMIES!
AHH!

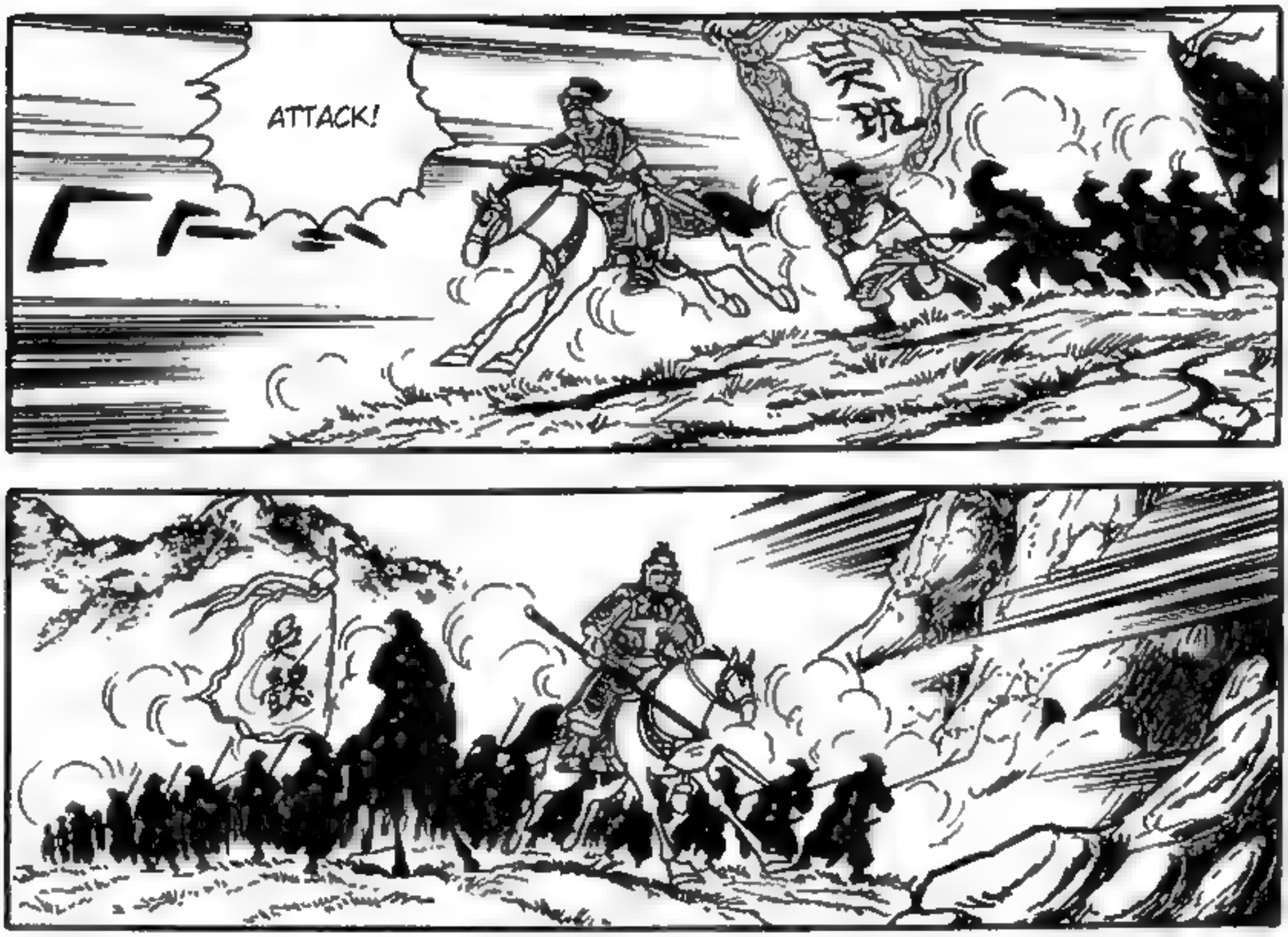
CHARGE!

AS IF I'D SURRENDER WITHOUT A FIGHT!

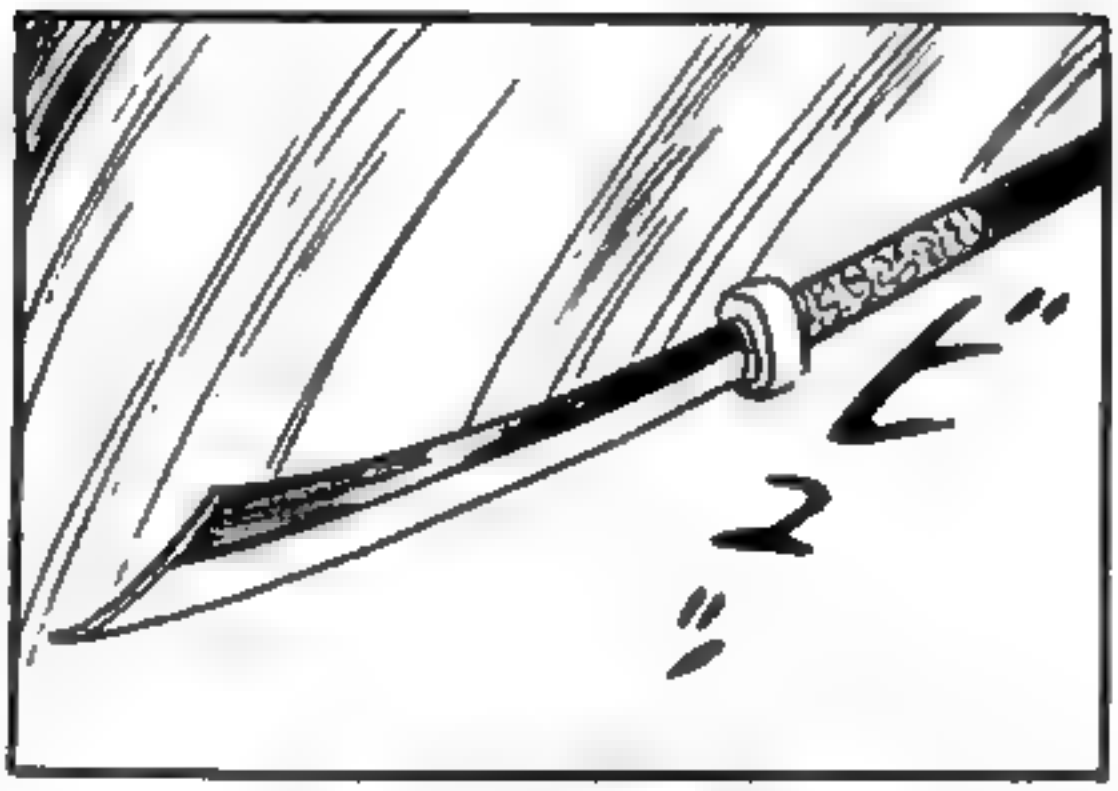
DID YOU THINK THOSE WERE THE ONLY HIDDEN TROOPS, QIN LIANG?

OVER HERE AS WELL!

*FLAGS READ WU BAN AND WU YI



AGHH!



THOSE WHO THROW DOWN THEIR WEAPONS WILL BE SPARED!
YOUR GENERAL IS DEAD! WILL YOU FOLLOW HIM OR WIL YOU SURRENDER!?

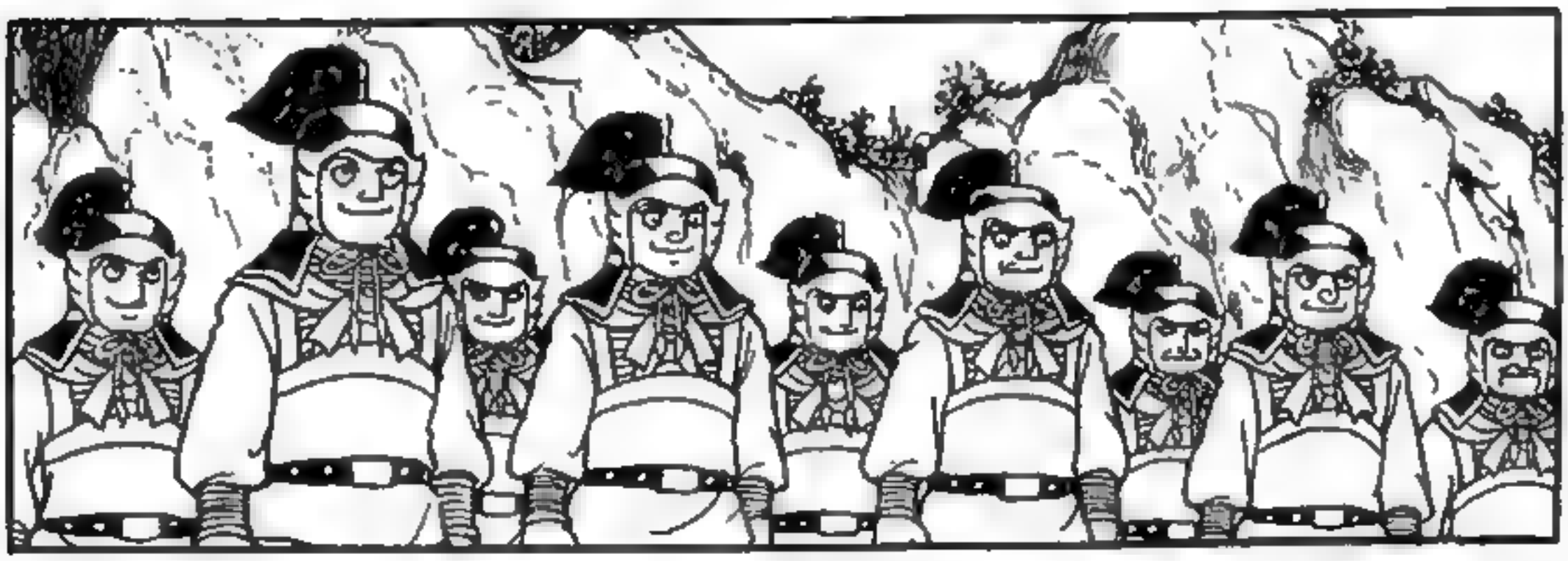
AGHH!

SIR!

?

GOOD, NOW TAKE OFF YOUR ARMOUR AS WELL.

YES, SIR.
PUT ON THE WEI ARMOUR.



GOOD,
THAT'LL DO.

?

?

YOU THERE.

YES, SIR?

YES, WE MAY EVEN CAPTURE CAO ZHEN IF ALL GOES RIGHT.

THE PLAN HAS GONE SMOOTHLY SO FAR, CHANCELLOR.

YES, SIR.

TELL HIM THAT QIN LIANG IS STILL SCOURING THE AREA TO BE EXTRA SURE BUT HE WILL RETURN SHORTLY.

GO REPORT TO CAO ZHEN THAT IT WAS A FALSE ALARM. THERE ARE STILL NO SHU TROOPS IN THE VICINITY.

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YES, GENERAL QIN LIANG SENT ME BACK FIRST TO INFORM YOU WHILE HE SCOURS THE AREA TO BE EXTRA SURE.
THERE WERE NO SHU TROOPS?

YES, SIR.

WELL TELL HIM I APPRECIATE HIS HARD WORK.

TRANSLATED BY HOX

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三国志

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横山 光輝

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